NEW

100% UNOFFICIAL

REAL HISTORY OF THE PEAKY BLINDERS

DISCOVER THE REAL-LIFE EVENTS AND FAMOUS FIGURES THAT INSPIRED THE HIT CRIME DRAMA

Fact vs fiction

HOW DO THE STORYLINES COMPARE TO REALITY?

THE ROAD TO WAR

WHAT HISTORY CAN REVEAL ABOUT THE FINAL SERIES

NOTORIOUS CRIMINALS

GANGSTERS, GUNS AND INFAMY IN INTERWAR BRITAIN

POST-WWI BRITAIN • JESSIE EDEN • THE GREAT DEPRESSION • OSWALD MOSLEY

Digital Edition

FUTURE

FIRST EDITION

BY ORDER OF THE PEAKY BLINDERS…

Discover the fascinating historical events, heroes and villains that have inspired the dark and dangerous world of one of the greatest crime dramas, *Peaky Blinders*.

In this special edition, we'll meet the real-life gang who influenced the stories of the cunning antihero Tommy Shelby and his family, and find out what life was really like in interwar Britain, exploring the context of the show's setting.

We'll sort fact from fiction to show how historical events and famous figures were transformed into gripping storylines and captivating characters. Learn how the real Jessie Eden fought for the rights of her fellow workers, why violent gangs battled to rule the racecourses, and how Oswald Mosley drove Britain dangerously towards fascism.

Also inside, we look ahead to see what history can reveal about the events that may provide the backdrop to the final series - such as the Great Depression and the rise of the Nazis - as the world found itself hurtling inexorably towards war once again…

FUTURE

REAL HISTORY OF THE
PEAKY BLINDERS

Future PLC Quay House, The Ambury, Bath, BA1 1UA

The Real History of Peaky Blinders Editorial
Editor **Jacqueline Snowden**
Designer **Briony Duguid**
Picture Editor **Richard Tole**
Senior Art Editor **Andy Downes**
Head of Art & Design **Greg Whitaker**
Editorial Director **Jon White**

All About History Editorial
Editor **Jonathan Gordon**
Art Editor **Kym Winters**
Editor-in-Chief **Tim Williamson**
Senior Art Editor **Duncan Crook**

Contributors
Kevin Bradburn, Hareth Al Bustani, David Crookes, Neil Crossley, Catherine Curzon, Marc Desantis, Tom Garner, Jonathan Gordon, Jessica Leggett, Kate Marsh, Tanita Matthews, Scott Reeves, Nick Soldinger, Jodie Tyley, Timothy Williamson, Penny Wilson, Willow Winsham

Cover images
Getty Images; Alamy

Photography
All copyrights and trademarks are recognised and respected

Advertising
Media packs are available on request
Commercial Director **Clare Dove**

International
Head of Print Licensing **Rachel Shaw**
licensing@futurenet.com
www.futurecontenthub.com

Circulation
Head of Newstrade **Tim Mathers**

Production
Head of Production **Mark Constance**
Production Project Manager **Matthew Eglinton**
Advertising Production Manager **Joanne Crosby**
Digital Editions Controller **Jason Hudson**
Production Managers **Keely Miller, Nola Cokely, Vivienne Calvert, Fran Twentyman**

Printed by William Gibbons, 26 Planetary Road,
Willenhall, West Midlands, WV13 3XT

Distributed by Marketforce, 5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London, E14 5HU
www.marketforce.co.uk Tel: 0203 787 9001

The Real History of Peaky Blinders First Edition (AHB4201)
© 2022 Future Publishing Limited

We are committed to only using magazine paper which is derived from responsibly managed, certified forestry and chlorine-free manufacture. The paper in this bookazine was sourced and produced from sustainable managed forests, conforming to strict environmental and socioeconomic standards. The paper holds full FSC or PEFC certification and accreditation.

All contents © 2022 Future Publishing Limited or published under licence. All rights reserved. No part of this magazine may be used, stored, transmitted or reproduced in any way without the prior written permission of the publisher. Future Publishing Limited (company number 2008885) is registered in England and Wales. Registered office: Quay House, The Ambury, Bath BA1 1UA. All information contained in this publication is for information only and is, as far as we are aware, correct at the time of going to press. Future cannot accept any responsibility for errors or inaccuracies in such information. You are advised to contact manufacturers and retailers directly with regard to the price of products/services referred to in this publication. Apps and websites mentioned in this publication are not under our control. We are not responsible for their contents or any other changes or updates to them. This magazine is fully independent and not affiliated in any way with the companies mentioned herein.

FUTURE
Connectors.
Creators.
Experience
Makers.

Future plc is a public company quoted on the London Stock Exchange (symbol: FUTR)
www.futureplc.com

Chief executive **Zillah Byng-Thorne**
Non-executive chairman **Richard Huntingford**
Chief financial officer **Penny Ladkin-Brand**

Tel +44 (0)1225 442 244

Part of the
ALL ABOUT HISTORY
bookazine series

Widely Recycled

ipso. For press freedom with responsibility

CONTENTS

SERIES ONE: WWI TO 1919

10 The Real Peaky Blinders
14 Post-WWI Britain
24 Secret Tunnel Wars
30 Billy Kimber
32 The Rise and Fall of British Communism

SERIES TWO: 1921-1922

38 Irish Independence and the IRA
46 Winston Churchill's Early Career
52 The Racecourse Wars

SERIES THREE: 1924

58 The Economic League
62 Flight of the Romanovs
70 From Russia with Loot

SERIES FOUR: 1925-1926

82 The General Strike of 1926
88 Jessie Eden
90 Prohibition and the Mob

SERIES FIVE: 1929

100 The Wall Street Crash
106 Glasgow Razor Gangs
110 Brilliant Chang
112 Timeline: The Rise of Fascism
114 Oswald Mosley and the BUF

SERIES SIX: 1930 AND BEYOND

122 Britain and the Great Depression
126 Timeline: The Interwar Years

Series one introduces us to a fictionalised version of the infamous Peaky Blinders gang, who use a crate of stolen guns as an opportunity to move up in the world

WWI to 1919

SERIES ONE

10 **THE REAL PEAKY BLINDERS**
Discover the real-life gang that inspired the hit crime drama

14 **POST-WWI BRITAIN**
Learn more about the show's interwar setting, and Birmingham in particular

24 **SECRET TUNNEL WARS**
The fictional Tommy Shelby served as a 'clay kicker' – see how these heroes fought a different war beneath the battlefields

30 **BILLY KIMBER**
Meet the leader of the Birmingham Boys gang who features as the antagonist of series one

32 **THE RISE AND FALL OF BRITISH COMMUNISM**
Through characters like Freddie Thorne and Ada Shelby we see the increase in popularity of communist ideals. But what factors led to a political shift across the nation?

Image: Alamy

SERIES ONE

THE REAL PEAKY BLINDERS

How the gang known as the Peaky Blinders came to dominate the criminal underworld in turn-of-the-century Birmingham

Words Neil Crossley

Few period crime dramas in recent decades have come close to matching the style, exhilaration and sheer audacity of *Peaky Blinders*. The BBC One drama first aired on 12 September 2013 and went on to spawn a cult following around the globe.

Created by screenwriter and film director Steven Knight, the series was inspired by the stories his mother and father told him about growing up in the Small Heath area of Birmingham. *Peaky Blinders* is a stylish and exquisitely compelling series in which revenge, betrayal and wrong footings abound. The accents are questionable at times and the violence is gaudy and exploitative, but there's a glorious swagger to the series, anchored by strong storylines and the powerful, charismatic performances of its stars, such as Cillian Murphy (Thomas Shelby) and Helen McCrory (Polly Gray).

Peaky Blinders is based only loosely on fact. There was no Thomas Shelby or Shelby family, for example. But there was certainly a Birmingham gang known as the Peaky Blinders. They might not have quite had the visual dynamism of the Irish-Romani-descended gang depicted in the TV series, but all evidence suggests they were equally as violent and ruthless.

DIVIDED SOCIETY

The harsh economic deprivations of working-class Victorian Britain formed the breeding ground for the gang that became known as the Peaky Blinders. Poverty was rife in the late 19th century, with over 25 percent of the population living at or above the subsistence level. Industrialisation had created a divided society and it's long been argued by historians that poverty was responsible for the criminal underclass that emerged in Britain in the 19th century.

In the large and burgeoning city of Birmingham, disenfranchised young men from the slums were forming a separate culture of their own. The origins of this subculture can be traced back to the 1850s when the police, due to pressure from the upper and middle classes, cracked down on gambling dens and rough street sports taking place in Birmingham's inner city. The youth fought back, banding together in what became known as 'slogging gangs'.

TURF WARS

By 1890, the Peaky Blinders had emerged from Small Heath and gained dominance by fighting for territory with rival slogging gangs. The name of the gang derives from the peaked caps worn by its members. One commonly held view suggests that gang members would stitch disposable razor blades into the peaks and headbutt their enemies in a bid to blind them, or use the peaks to slash foreheads so that blood ran down into their enemies' eyes.

But as the first disposable razorblades weren't manufactured in the UK until

Gangland Small Heath, Birmingham circa 1920 as portrayed by Steven Knight's stylish and pacey BBC One series *Peaky Blinders*

the early 1900s, some doubt has been cast on this theory. Birmingham historian Professor Carl Chinn has suggested that the name Peaky Blinder is actually more to do with the gang's sartorial elegance.

Whatever the reason, the Peaky Blinders became the most vicious gang to emerge in late-19th-century Birmingham. Writing in *The Birmingham Mail* in 2019, Professor Chinn noted that the Peaky Blinders and other gangs were "infamous for their violence and fighting with metal-tipped boots, stones, belt buckles and sometimes knives".

TAKING CONTROL

While the BBC One series is set largely in the 1920s, historical accounts state that the real gang held control for just 20 years, from approximately 1890 until 1910, although it seems likely that the term 'Peaky Blinders' prevailed for decades, passed into generic usage as a term for any street gang in Birmingham.

Steven Knight, the creator of the TV series whose family lived in Small Heath for generations, said that his aunts, uncles and grandparents recalled the term 'Peaky Blinders' being in common usage well into the 1930s.

Knight was inspired to write the TV series following a story his father told him. His father's uncles, the Sheldons – a name that influenced the fictional Shelbys – were bookmakers and part of the Peaky Blinders heritage. His father told him of being eight or nine years old and being asked by his own father to deliver a message to his uncles at an address in the city's Artillery Street.

"My dad was told to go and deliver this message," he told *BBC History* magazine in 2016, "so he ran through the streets barefoot, knocked on the door, the door opened and there was a table with about eight men sitting around it, immaculately dressed, wearing caps and with guns in their pockets. The table was covered with money – at a time when no-one had a penny – and they were all drinking beer out of jam jars because these men wouldn't spend money on glasses or cups. Just that image – smoke, booze and these immaculately dressed men in this slum in Birmingham – I thought, that's the mythology, that's the story, and that's the first image I started to work with."

LAND GRABS

The origins of the Peaky Blinders gang are slightly hazy, but they were certainly formed in Small Heath, possibly by a man named Thomas Mucklow. The first report of the gang appeared in *The Birmingham Mail* on 24 March 1890 and centred on their violent, unprovoked attack on a young man from Small Heath called George Eastwood, who left a pub called the Rainbow Public House in Adderley Street, after buying a bottle of ginger beer. Eastwood was beaten viciously with belt buckles. "A murderous outrage at Small Heath, a man's skull fractured," ran the newspaper report.

> "The real Peaky Blinders might not have quite had the visual dynamism of the gang depicted in the TV series, but all evidence suggests they were equally as violent and ruthless"

The gang focused on the acquisition of favourable land in Small Heath and Cheapside, extreme slum areas of Birmingham. Their expansion was noted by rival gang the 'Cheapside Sloggers', who battled against them in an effort to control land. The Sloggers had originated in the 1870s and were known for street fights in the Bordesley and Small Heath areas.

The Peaky Blinders prevailed, gaining control of territory and expanding their criminal enterprise. This included protection rackets, fraud, land grabs, smuggling, hijacking, robbery and racketeering. The gang became notorious for its violence against innocent civilians, rival gangs and the police. The Peaky Blinders deliberately attacked police officers, which became known as 'constable baiting'. In 1897, a police constable called George Snipe was killed by the gang and four years later another constable, Charles Philip Gunter, also had his life taken. Hundreds more police officers were injured and the level of violence prompted some to leave the force.

> "The distinctive dress of the Peaky Blinders was easily recognisable to the police and public"

PROMINENT MEMBERS

By far the most powerful member of the Peaky Blinders was a man known as Kevin Mooney, whose real name was Thomas Gilbert. Other prominent members were David Taylor, Earnest Bayles, Stephen McNickle and Harry Fowles, who was known as 'baby-face Harry'. The gang used an assortment of weapons, such as belt buckles, fire irons, metal-tipped boots, canes and knives. Firearms like Webley Revolvers were also used, such as in the shooting and killing of a Summer Hill gang member by Peaky Blinder William Lacey in September 1905.

Despite their fearsome reputation, there was no real organised strategy to the Peaky Blinders. In a lecture at Leeds Samuel Beckett University in 2013, academic Dr Heather Shore argued that the real Peaky Blinders were more focused on street fighting, robbery and racketeering, as opposed to organised crime. It's a view reinforced by historian Professor Carl Chinn. "Peaky Blinders gangs were not big time criminals," he told *Express.co.uk* in April 2020. "They were backstreet thugs and petty criminals, whose main objective was to show off their fighting prowess."

CLAMPDOWN

The Peaky Blinders ruled the Birmingham streets for two decades, but by 1910 they had lost power to rival gang the Birmingham Boys, led by former gang member Billy Kimber. The Peaky Blinders' expansion into racecourses had prompted a violent backlash from the Birmingham Boys gang. Over time, Peaky Blinder families moved to the countryside, distancing themselves from Birmingham's centre and its criminal underworld. By the end of 1920s, a London gang called the Sabinis – who entered the story arc in series two of the TV show – had ousted the Birmingham Boys and claimed all of the Peaky Blinders' former Birmingham territories.

In truth, the very existence of Birmingham's ruthless gangs had been under threat since 1899, when police chief constable Charles Haughton

Dressed to kill

Members of the Peaky Blinders gang flaunted their illicitly won wealth via their overtly stylish clothes. Unlike other Birmingham gangs, almost all of the Peaky Blinders wore tailored suits, long lapelled coats, button waistcoats, bell-bottomed trousers, leather boots and peaked caps. Some of the wealthier members were even more sartorial dynamic, sporting penny collared shirts with starched collars, metal tie buttons and silk scarves.

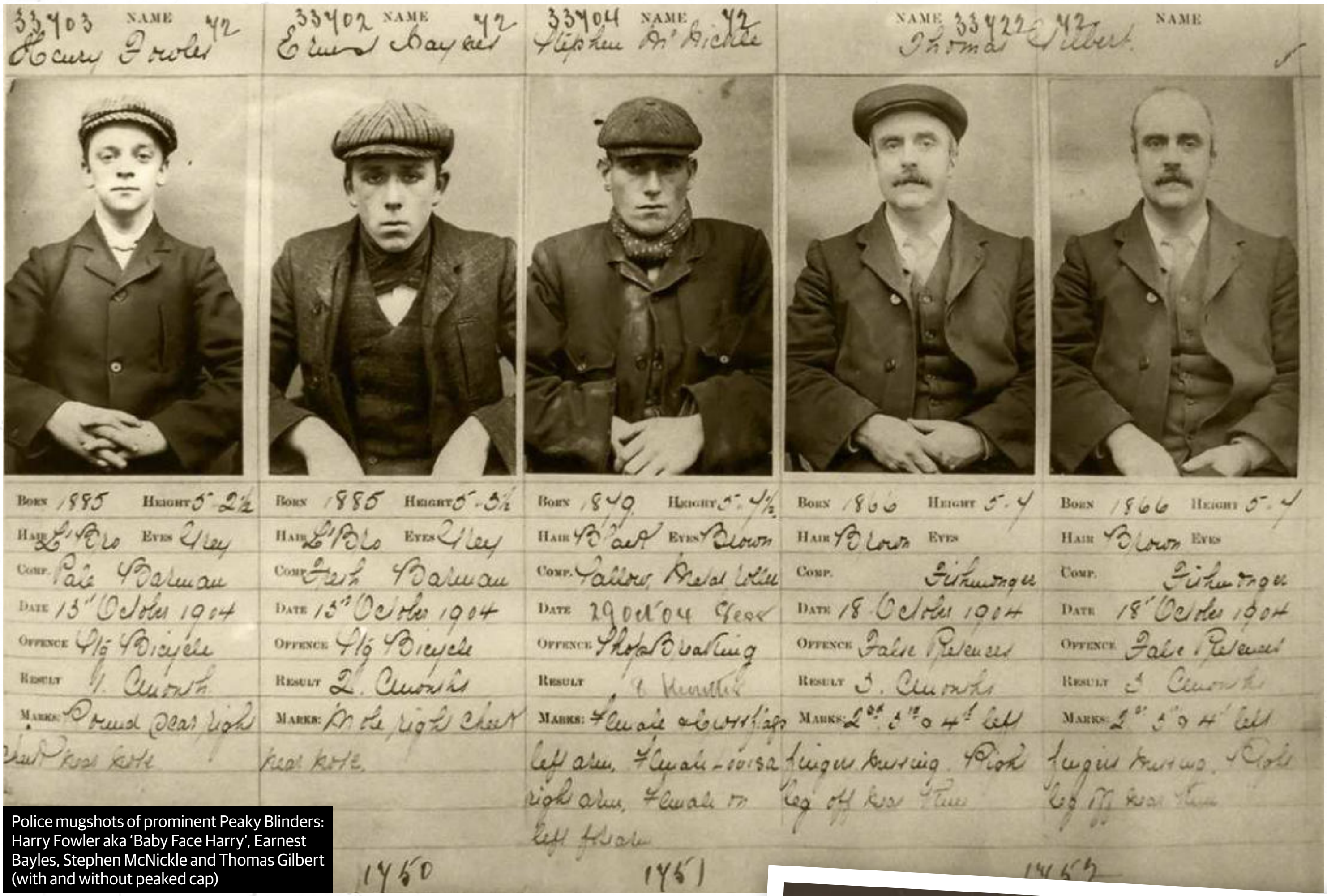
Their wives, girlfriends and mistresses were equally striking, wearing lavish clothing, pearls, silks and colourful scarves. The distinctive dress of the Peaky Blinders and their entourage made them easily recognisable to the police, rival gang members and the general public.

Unlike other gangs, the Peaky Blinders and their entourage had a distinct sense of style, as evoked here in the TV series

Many gang members were as young as 12, such as Charles Lambourne

C. Lambourne

The Peaky Blinders emerged from extreme slum areas such as Small Heath and Cheapside


33403 NAME Henry Fowler 42
33402 NAME Ernest Bayles 42
33404 NAME Stephen McNickle 42
NAME 33422 42 Thomas Gilbert
NAME
Born 1885 Height 5' 2½
Born 1885 Height 5' 3½
Born 1849 Height 5' 4½
Born 1866 Height 5' 4
Born 1866 Height 5' 4
Offence Stealing Bicycle
Offence Shopbreaking
Offence False Pretences
1450
1451
1452

Police mugshots of prominent Peaky Blinders: Harry Fowler aka 'Baby Face Harry', Earnest Bayles, Stephen McNickle and Thomas Gilbert (with and without peaked cap)

Rafter was appointed with the task of turning the nation's second city around. He embarked on a "rapid recruitment campaign of fit and young men" – hiring up to 500 additional police officers. "They asked three things: Can you read? Can you write? And, can you fight?" Professor Chinn told *Express.co.uk*. "They needed to have a certain standard of education but also had to be tough lads with lots of physical training."

The police were no longer outnumbered and stood a chance of being able to arrest gang members. The presence of more police on the streets encouraged more people from the area to report crimes. "Before, they were reluctant and some were too scared to come to the police as the Peaky Blinders would attack them," said Chinn.

Rafter also secured longer sentences, which deterred younger people from joining gangs. By the second decade of the 20th century, more children were attending school, while social changes and increased leisure activities for children made a dent in the number of people that gangs could actually recruit.

LASTING LEGACY

Over a century on, the legacy of the Peaky Blinders in most people's eyes will be immortalised in the high production values and riveting, fast-paced drama playing out across the six series of the hugely successful BBC TV show.

For series creator Steven Knight, the existence of such a turbulent, dramatic past on the very Small Heath streets where he grew up came as something of a revelation, as did the fact that his family had a direct link to the gang. He recalls the old tenements before they were knocked down, and the Garrison pub – recreated as a pivotal Peaky Blinders HQ in the TV series – where his grandfather would bang out a tune on the piano in exchange for free beer and whiskey, after the horses he had bet on that day failed to win.

Knight would often have to coax the stories out of his relatives. But the more he heard, the more it fired his imagination.

"It was reluctantly delivered, but my family did give me little snapshots, of gypsies and horses and gang fights and guns, and immaculate suits," Knight told *GQ* magazine in September 2019. "This was mad, wild stuff that most writers wouldn't dare put into a work of fiction because it was too far out, but it was true – all of it. It was our history."

Peaky Blinders creator Steven Knight was inspired to write the series after hearing stories of the gang from his parents as a child

Images: Getty, Alamy

Fact vs fiction

Peaky Blinders is set between the world wars, with the first series beginning shortly after the end of WWI. The interwar period was a time of great change across Britain, but also saw much suffering. The show touches on social issues of that era, such as PTSD, unemployment, poverty and a growing sense of disillusionment among the working classes. The fictional Shelby clan are based in Birmingham and, as depicted in the show, the city was a major industrial hub. Weapons factories like the real-life Birmingham Smalls Arms Company had made vital contributions to the war effort.

Crowds gather outside Buckingham Palace on Armistice Day 1918 to celebrate the end of the war

SERIES ONE

BRITAIN AFTER THE GREAT WAR

While World War I was fought abroad, peacetime saw conflict spread across Britain

Words Katharine Marsh

War was over. The soldiers who hadn't been killed on the battlefields made their way home. After four years of bloodshed, the world seemed quiet – the kaiser had been conquered, and things could return to normal.

But normality hardly ever follows war, and especially not one on the scale of the Great War of 1914-18. Soldiers were missing limbs or parts of their sanity. Mothers, wives and children were mourning loved ones. Governments were strapped for cash and trying to figure out a constantly changing geopolitical landscape. It seemed no part of life would be the same as the fateful assassination of Franz Ferdinand in 1914.

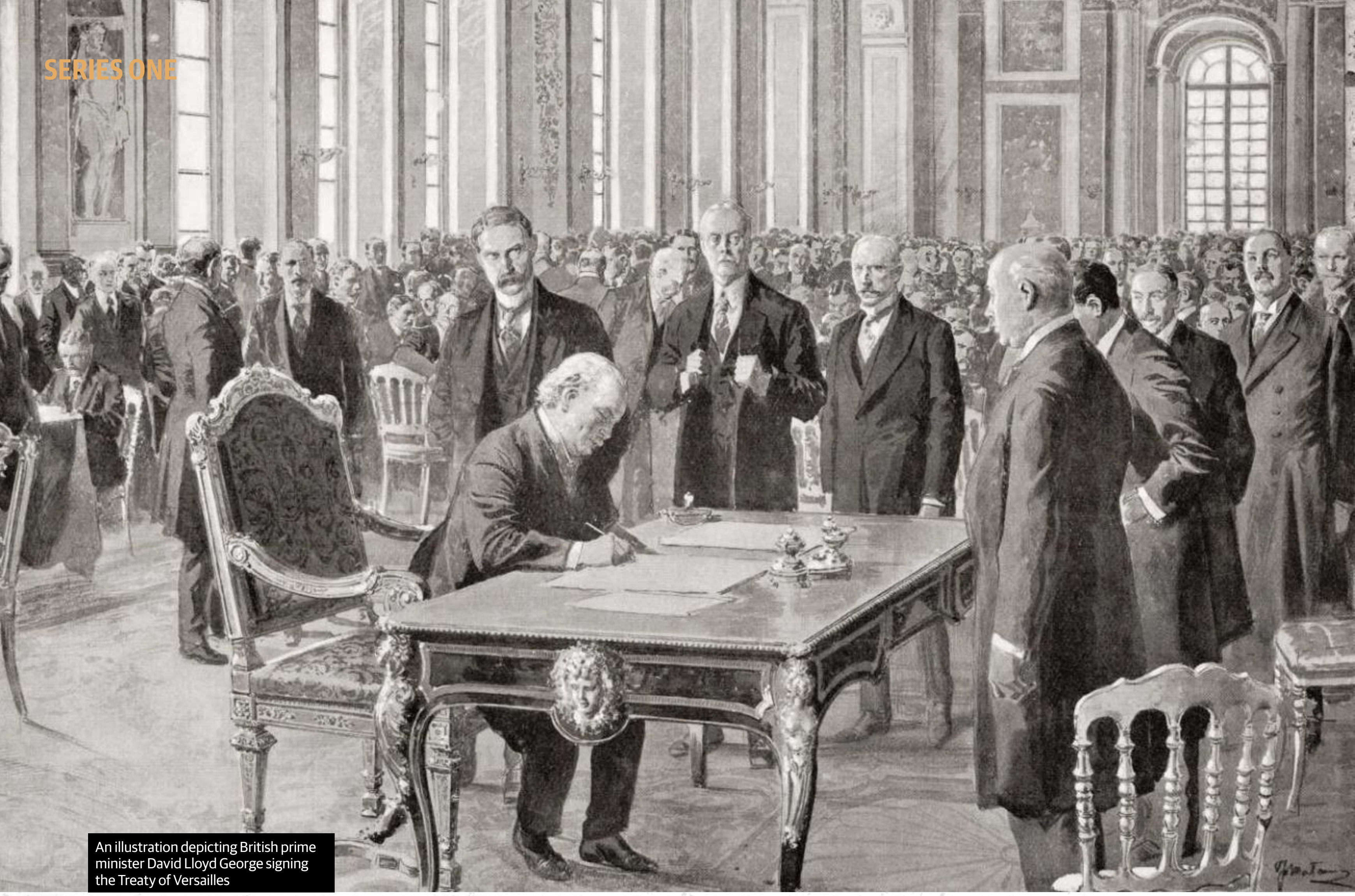
Britain was no different; everything was turned on its head. Republicans in Dublin had already started to make a violent bid for independence during the war, and now support for them was stronger than ever. Women were ramping up their efforts to gain suffrage after proving their worth when the men were away. National celebration was quickly turning to consternation – how would the government support its veterans? How would Britain continue as a dominant world power when it had no money?

LONG LIVE DEMOCRACY

If the war had proved one thing, it was that all people (or, at least, all *British* people) were created pretty equally. The upper classes didn't seem quite so stiff-lipped anymore; they had been fighting side by side with the common folk in the trenches, gangrene and all. When the war ended, so did the strict Edwardian class divide – which was no bad thing, considering how similar monarchical societies had fared elsewhere in Europe.

Now that the classes seemed to be on a (slightly) more even playing field, the working class could wield a little more power. Building up support during the war years, the time had finally come for a big push in terms of the vote. The Representation of the People Act, passed in June 1918, extended suffrage to all men over the age of 21 for the first time, as well as women over the age of 30. Britain's voting population had almost trebled, from 7.7 million to 21.4 million.

Having said that, the 1918 general election had the lowest voter turnout of any 20th-century election. There was no landslide win, either; a coalition of David Lloyd George's Liberals and Conservatives took charge with 473 of the 707 seats available. It seemed that one of



An illustration depicting British prime minister David Lloyd George signing the Treaty of Versailles

the issues was with the electorate – while the party leaders wanted an election focused on the reconstruction of Britain, the people were too focused on the punishment of Germany. It seemed the political stage was set.

NO MONEY, MORE PROBLEMS

Germany was to blame for the world's ills. At least, that's what the British public seemed to think. Voting in the coalition was a sign to politicians that Britain wanted a harsh treaty, one that would seek to kick Germany while it was down. Severely.

And so the Treaty of Versailles was drawn up quickly and efficiently. But perhaps it was too quick – it went into effect on 28 June 1919, less than a year after the war's end. More to the point, Germany hadn't even been involved. The victors had wanted to ensure Germany would never be able to rise up like this again (not realising they were being the catalyst for Germany doing exactly that 15 years later), and it would come at a price. A rather hefty one. It didn't take long for the British public to realise that Germany wouldn't be able to pay it, and that one source of the country's income was gone.

That was a problem for a country that had incurred debts equivalent to 136 percent of its gross national product. With the country running at a deficit, inflation was sure to be just around the corner. Strikes took place up and down the country – in fact there were more workers striking in Britain than in a decimated Germany. Coal, shipbuilding and steel, all vital industries

Shell shocked

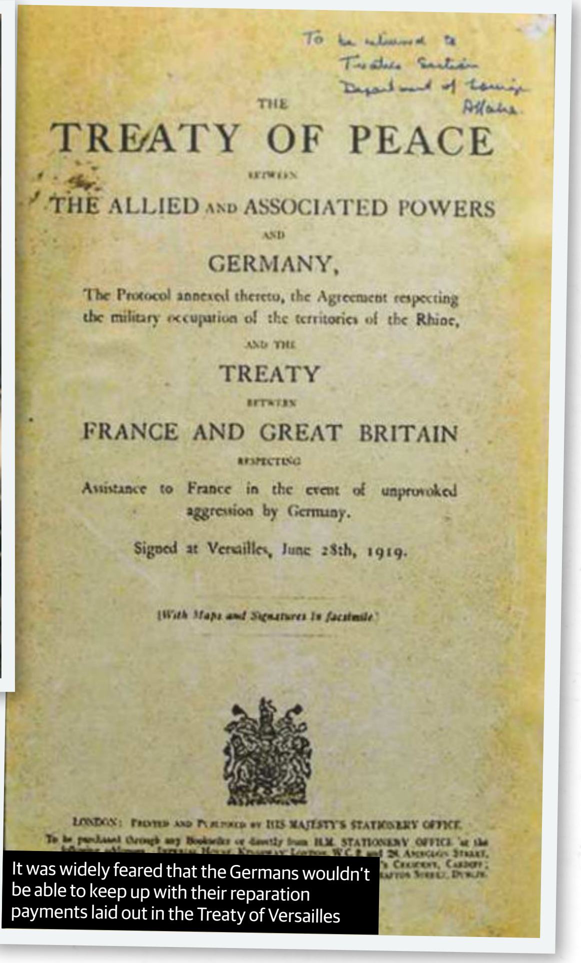
The horrors of World War I have been told for more than 100 years, but it's still hard to imagine life as a soldier returning home. Those fighting in the trenches would have to watch as their brothers in arms were killed right next to them. Constant bombardment meant little to no sleep. For some, it was months or years of sheer terror.

It was the sheer number of veterans coming back with trauma and catatonia that sparked a new term: combat stress reaction, or shell shock. As early as 1915, army hospitals were having to treat soldiers with "wounded minds", suffering from blurred vision and fits. It was completely unprecedented – and yet about 80,000 British soldiers were treated for their affliction.

But in the army, men were supposed to be men. Being diagnosed with shell shock was surrounded with stigma,

According to soldiers, when a push was made over the top of the trenches, at least one soldier would come back mad

In *Peaky Blinders*, we see Tommy Shelby suffering from PTSD, and a more severe case of shell shock in his war buddy Danny 'Whizz-Bang' Owen (Samuel Edward-Cook)



To be returned to
Treaties Section
Department of Foreign
Affairs

THE
TREATY OF PEACE
BETWEEN
THE ALLIED AND ASSOCIATED POWERS
AND
GERMANY,
The Protocol annexed thereto, the Agreement respecting
the military occupation of the territories of the Rhine,
AND THE
TREATY
BETWEEN
FRANCE AND GREAT BRITAIN
RESPECTING
Assistance to France in the event of unprovoked
aggression by Germany.
Signed at Versailles, June 28th, 1919.

[With Maps and Signatures in facsimile]

LONDON: PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY HIS MAJESTY'S STATIONERY OFFICE.
To be purchased through any Bookseller or directly from H.M. STATIONERY OFFICE at the

It was widely feared that the Germans wouldn't be able to keep up with their reparation payments laid out in the Treaty of Versailles

> "It didn't take long for the British public to realise that Germany wouldn't be able to pay its reparations – and that one source of Britain's income was gone"

and often attributed to moral weakness and cowardice. Today it's clear that the men were suffering from severe PTSD. Treatment was nothing short of harsh – electroshock therapy was one such 'cure'. Unsurprisingly, 80 percent of those treated were unable to continue their service.

Once they had returned home, the servicemen didn't fare any better. With no support or understanding of shell shock or PTSD, ex-soldiers were left to fend for themselves. One soldier, Joseph Clements, told the Imperial War Museum that as a tram came towards him in Gosport, he couldn't move. He was stuck, just staring at the vehicle coming towards him. His life, and the lives of many others, would never be the same again.

in 1914-18, were collapsing. The women who had worked in the factories were forced out as the men returned home. Unemployment was rife – in 1921, it reached its highest point since records began at a staggering 11.3 percent thanks to an industry restructuring that saw almost one-quarter of the workforce lose their jobs.

Economic change was inevitable after the war. The world was different now. The government's solution? A return to the pre-war gold standard of $4.86. But the only way to do this was severe deflation, reducing domestic prices and wages. Between 1921 and 1929, wholesale prices fell by 25 percent, but it turned out they weren't matched by falling wages. Unionised labour movements were resisting wage cuts, leading to real wage unemployment; the supply of labour was outstripping demand. Furthermore, the deflation was discouraging consumer spending.

In Britain, the Roaring Twenties is a bit of a misnomer. The US was enjoying becoming an economic powerhouse, especially now that it wasn't loaning anything to the UK. Britons were struggling, but none more so than the returning soldiers.

THE SOLDIERS' PLIGHT

World War I had seen almost 1 million British soldiers, sailors and airmen killed. Of the supposedly lucky men who returned, nearly 2 million of them were now physically disabled. 40,000 of them had lost arms or legs and would need financial support to keep them afloat in a world not made for the disabled. It was money that the government didn't have.

Artificial limbs did exist, but they were heavy and made of wood. The Disabled Society campaigned for light aluminium alternatives, and ex-servicemen started getting them fitted at places like Queen Mary's Hospital in Roehampton.

For those who had been permanently disfigured, plastic surgery became available thanks to facial surgery pioneer Sir Harold Gillies. Artist Francis Derwent-Wood created masks for those whose faces had been burnt and couldn't be operated on.

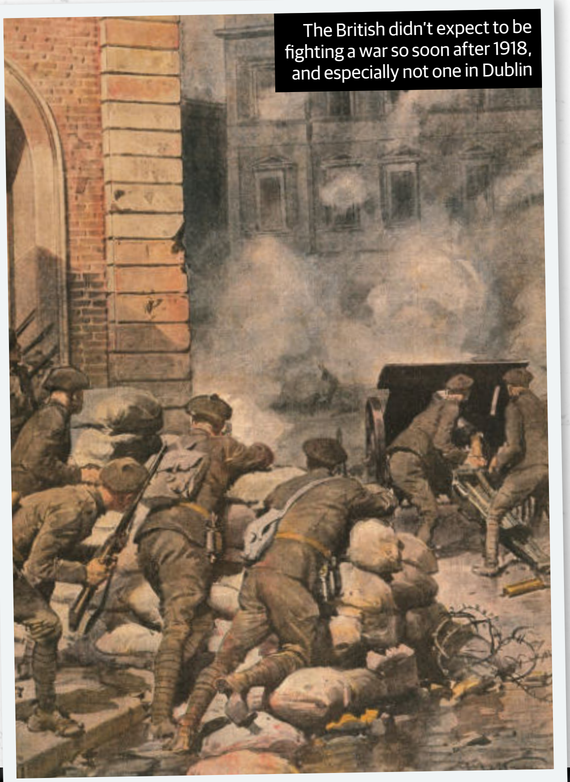
But the main issue was how the ex-servicemen could contribute to society in peacetime – it wasn't enough that they'd given their bodies and minds in service of their country. They now needed to be retrained. Homes were set up to help – St Dunstan's in Regent's Park, London, took in 1,833 blinded ex-servicemen, while the Star and Garter in Richmond, Surrey, took in soldiers and sailors. The British Legion opened its poppy factory in Richmond, employing the war wounded, and some trained as limb fitters at Roehampton. However, it was near impossible for them to find work outside of these special schemes. In 1919, the King's National Roll was created in a bid to encourage companies to employ disabled ex-servicemen. It failed.

If the disabled weren't working, they weren't getting any money. With no money, there could be no food or housing. So special villages were set up around the UK for ex-servicemen and their families, like Haig Homes in Welwyn Garden City and Westfield War Memorial Village in Lancaster. The Prince of Wales opened Leicester's North Memorial Homes in 1927, providing another 35 homes.

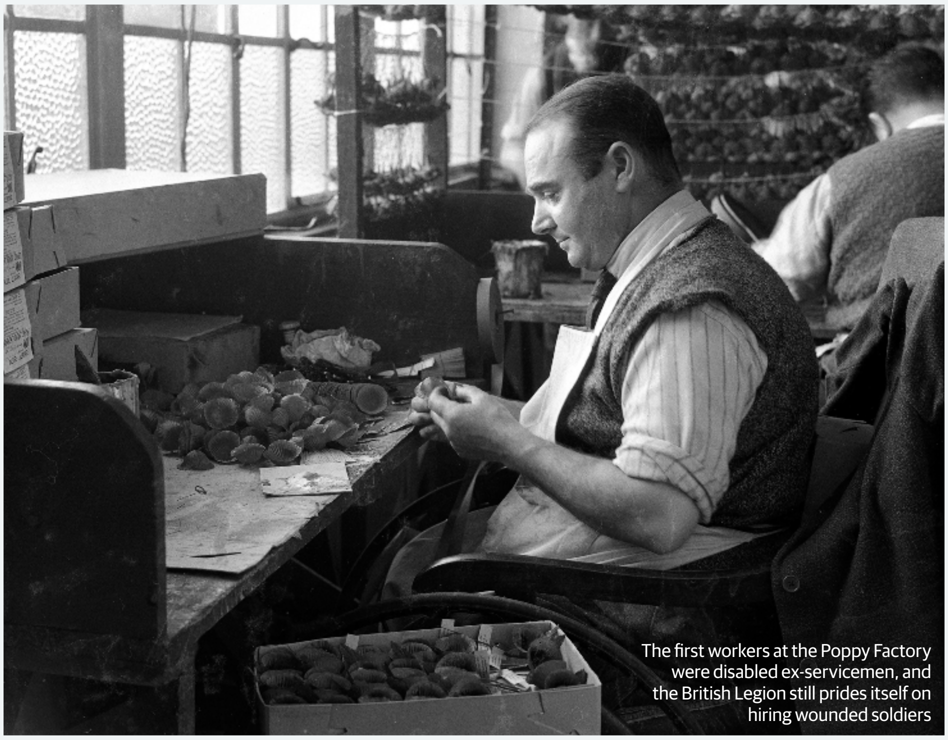
Regardless of the help, the soldiers' lives would never be the same. There was nothing the government could offer that would take away the haunting memories of the war.

TROUBLE IN DUBLIN

While one war had ended, another was starting, and a little too close to home. In 1916, some republican Dubliners had had a little too much


The British didn't expect to be fighting a war so soon after 1918, and especially not one in Dublin

Women helped the war effort by working in factories across Britain, such as the Birmingham Small Arms factory, pictured here in 1917



The first workers at the Poppy Factory were disabled ex-servicemen, and the British Legion still prides itself on hiring wounded soldiers

Blinded soldiers attend a concert at St Dunstan's in Regents Park, London, 1917

of British rule. They'd been campaigning for independence for a while, but now it was time to take it by force. And what better time than when British soldiers were fighting a war abroad?

On 21 January 1919, Sinn Féin assembled in Dublin and issued the Irish Declaration of Independence. Ambushes and raids saw Ireland descend into chaos. Catholics all over the country didn't want to be ruled by Protestant England, but Protestants in the north were putting up a good fight.

With the British government done with war and fighting, in a sort-of compromise in 1920, the Government of Ireland Act looked to create separate parliaments for the north and south of Ireland. Two years later, the Anglo-Irish Treaty created the Irish Free State, now a dominion of the British Empire and comprising 26 of Ireland's 32 counties. The remainder became Northern Ireland, still part of the United Kingdom – a move that has caused tensions there to this day.

BEYOND BRITAIN

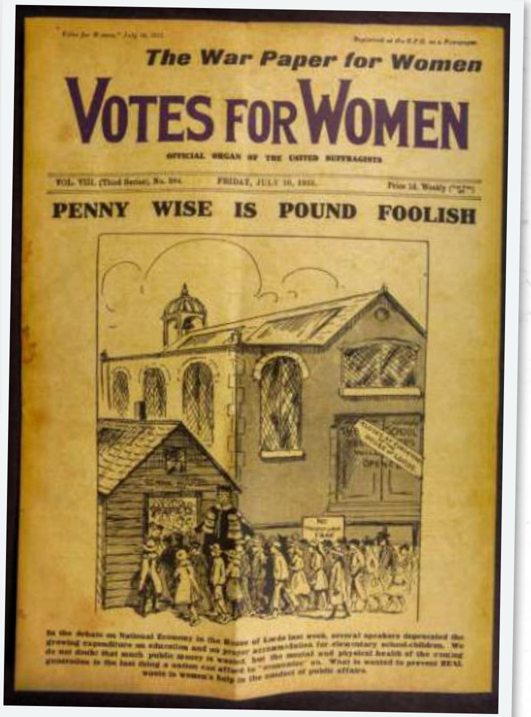
Britain wasn't in a great state, but it's probably fair to say that other nations had it much worse. The Bolsheviks had risen up in Russia, kickstarting a communist regime

Votes for women!

World War I saw the typical British spirit come out. As the men went to war on the Continent, the women who were left behind wanted to do their bit, so they took up the vacant positions in the factories.

Suffrage organisations took a hiatus, opting to help the war effort. Emmeline Pankhurst suspended the Women's Social and Political Union to put her focus on helping the government recruit women into war work. And finally, there was no denying it: anything men could do, women could do just as well. That didn't stop them from getting paid less, though. Now that women had proved they were just as capable as the men, why shouldn't they be able to vote and stand for office?

When peace was declared, the fight for women's suffrage was back on (although it hadn't really stopped behind closed doors). The Representation of the People Act was a small victory – women over the age of 30 who met a property qualification (or their husband did) were now able to vote. That was two-thirds of the female population in the UK. The problem was that the younger, single women who had toiled in the factories were still unable to have their voice heard. It would be another ten years of hard graft before they were on an equal footing with men in the Equal Franchise Act.



The War Paper for Women

VOTES FOR WOMEN

OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE UNITED SUFFRAGISTS

PENNY WISE IS POUND FOOLISH

While campaigning officially stopped during the war, it was always going on in some form

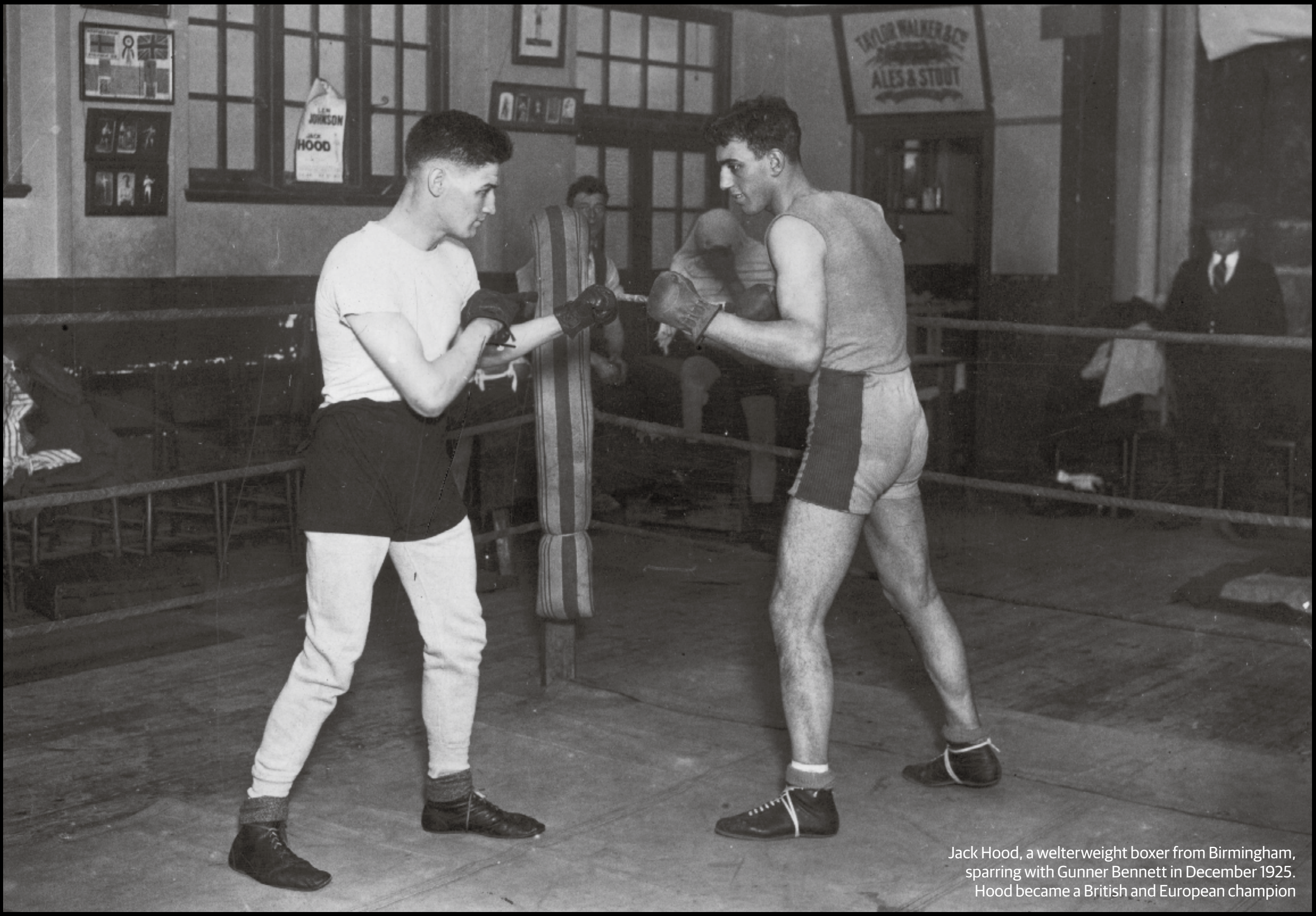
On 26 April 1928, then chancellor Winston Churchill broadcasts a summary of his budget to the public from a BBC radio station

that would incur famine. To many poor men and women at the time, it seemed an attractive alternative; finally, they'd have the opportunity to become equals with those higher up the social ladder. Naturally, Western governments tried to stamp it out.

Germany, Austria and Hungary were riddled with revolutions and counter-revolutions, with paramilitaries crushing workers' unions and securing borders. In Italy, Mussolini was on the rise with his fascist party with a score to settle – their perceived slight was that they weren't treated as an equal with the other victors in the Treaty of Versailles. The Ottoman Empire was drawing its last breath in a bloody war to establish an independent Turkey.

When Britain looked abroad, it saw the United States as its closest ally. The Washington Naval Treaty, signed in 1922, was an agreement that both countries would maintain parity in the building of battleships. Closer to home, France was the other dominant power in Europe, but Britain refused to sign an alliance. France was concerned that Germany and Russia would rise up to start another war (their fears, it turns out, weren't exactly unfounded), but Britain couldn't afford another war.

The French premier, Raymond Poincaré was less than thrilled at British attitudes and Germany's failure to meet its payments. He wrote:



Jack Hood, a welterweight boxer from Birmingham, sparring with Gunner Bennett in December 1925. Hood became a British and European champion

Boxing features throughout *Peaky Blinders* as a popular spectator sport

"Judging others by themselves, the English, who are blinded by their loyalty, have always thought that the Germans did not abide by their pledges inscribed in the Versailles Treaty because they had not frankly agreed to them… We, on the contrary, believe that if Germany, far from making the slightest effort to carry out the treaty of peace, has always tried to escape her obligations, it is because until now she has not been convinced of her defeat…. We are also certain that Germany, as a nation, resigns herself to keep her pledged word only under the impact of necessity."

Britain would eventually come around when Ramsay MacDonald was installed as prime minister in 1924. Together Britain and France would sign the Geneva Protocol and call for a disarmament conference. But when MacDonald lost power, foreign policy faced another u-turn. And so it would continue.

IT'S NOT ALL DOOM AND GLOOM

Not everything in the post-war era was dreary. 1920 kicked off the golden age of radio after the first radio news program was broadcast on 31 August in the United States. Crystal radios began to become widespread as they were easy to make from home – even boys' magazines had instructions. By 1924, radios with vacuum tubes came onto the market, and models were improved upon year after year. For those who wanted to see their entertainment, silent movies were introduced In the early 1920s and Hollywood was born. Some form of escapism was definitely needed after the horrors of the Great War.

Cars were becoming more commonplace, and Henry Ford's assembly line made manufacture cheaper (although that also meant that fewer labourers were needed). Science also saw a small boom – people became interested in nutrition and physical health, having the knock-on effect of living longer and feeling better. New immunisations meant that fewer people were dying of diseases like diphtheria. The tetanus shot would come later in 1938.

So it turned out that post-war Britain wasn't the era of stability the population had hoped for. While there were significant ups – a higher electorate, the 'talkies' and more social mobility, to name just three – it was a hard time for many. With no jobs, some with no limbs or eyesight, the late 1910s and 1920s were fraught with difficulties – although it would all get much worse when the Great Depression hit in 1929. Regardless, the British were never a people to give up, and it was this attitude that would see them through the difficult interwar years and the second global conflict that was waiting on the horizon.

Fighting in peacetime

If you're looking to train a good and effective soldier, some hand-to-hand fighting skills are pretty much essential – and that's definitely how the American and British militaries felt when they began training troops for World War I. Boxing became a regular training exercise, and soon became a form of entertainment, too. The London Command Deport Boxing Tournament was held on 1 June 1917 and saw several soldiers take each other on.

When troops were deployed on the Continent, boxing matches were organised to keep up morale, and it only made sense for it to continue at home. The men needed to get their aggression out, and watching bloody sports is something people have been doing since antiquity.

Clubs already existed up and down Britain, and national championships had been held every year since 1881 (except during 1915-18). Now that the sport had been linked with war heroes, it was seen as character building, helping men to develop skill and courage.

A boxing match takes place at a British camp in Egypt during World War I

LIFE IN BIRMINGHAM

It didn't matter how much one city could give, its people could still end up destitute

By the end of World War I, Birmingham had given 12,320 citizens who would never return. At further 35,000 came home injured. A lot of the men had been drafted into Birmingham City Battalions of various numbers before being joined together in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. It was a large price to pay, but even those who didn't go to fight abroad were involved in the war effort.

When Germany invaded Belgium in 1914, many Belgians fled. Out of the 100,000 who headed straight for safety in Britain, 4,000 arrived in Birmingham and were welcomed into households. They were also given jobs at local factories that were helping the war effort alongside women as the men left to fight.

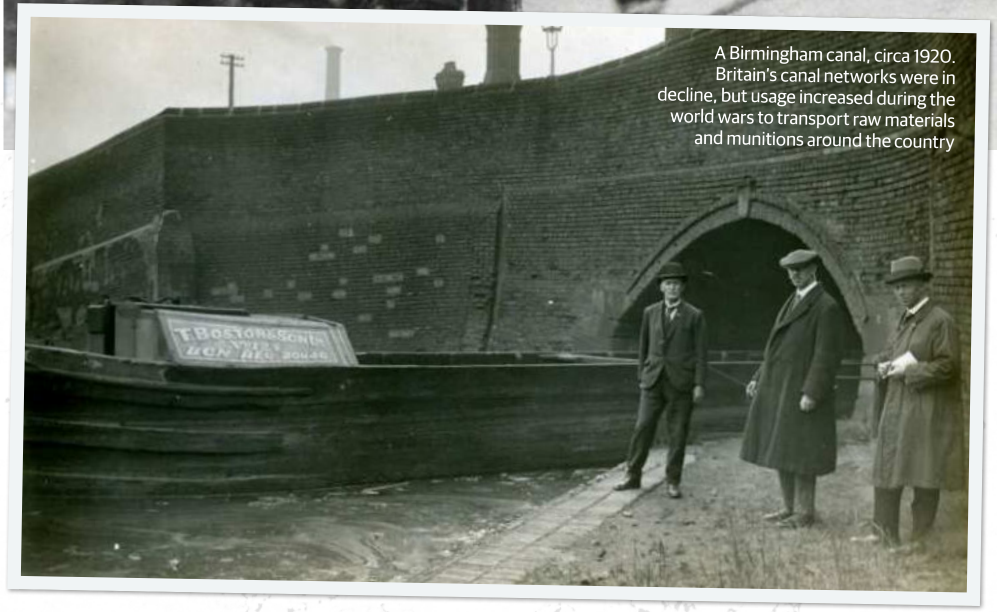
Round-the-clock production was seen as essential in many of Birmingham's factories, like Mills Munitions. About 4 million of the 75 million munitions that supplied British and Allied troops were made there, mostly by teenage girls. The pay wasn't great, though – at just £1 a week for working 12 hours a day, six days a week, food was almost unaffordable. Many couldn't find places to live. It wasn't just Mills Munitions that worked its employees to the bone – other factories in the Birmingham area included Birmingham Small Arms and Metal Co, Messrs Kynoch and Co and the National Arms and Ammunition Co. Factories at Oldbury in the west Midlands also had the task of making some of the first tanks in World War I.

As a result of low wages, 200,000 people were crammed into houses close to the city centre. It was unsanitary, and 40,000 houses were back to back, so there was little room. Those who were slightly better off could afford tunnel-back terraces that ran in long, straight streets. Birmingham was one of the worst places to live in the UK, and it was well known that some sort of improvement was needed. If nothing else, it would have been a reward for the commitment Brummies had shown towards the war effort in 1914-18.

A 1919 survey showed that 14,500 new homes were needed within three years. It was a high-reaching target, but with almost one-quarter of a million people living in such appalling conditions, the council had to start somewhere. 10,000 was the new goal, to be built in three years, but only 3,234 appeared. 92 percent of them were what was known as the 3B type, with a parlour, living room, scullery and three bedrooms; hardly conducive to the number of people who needed housing.

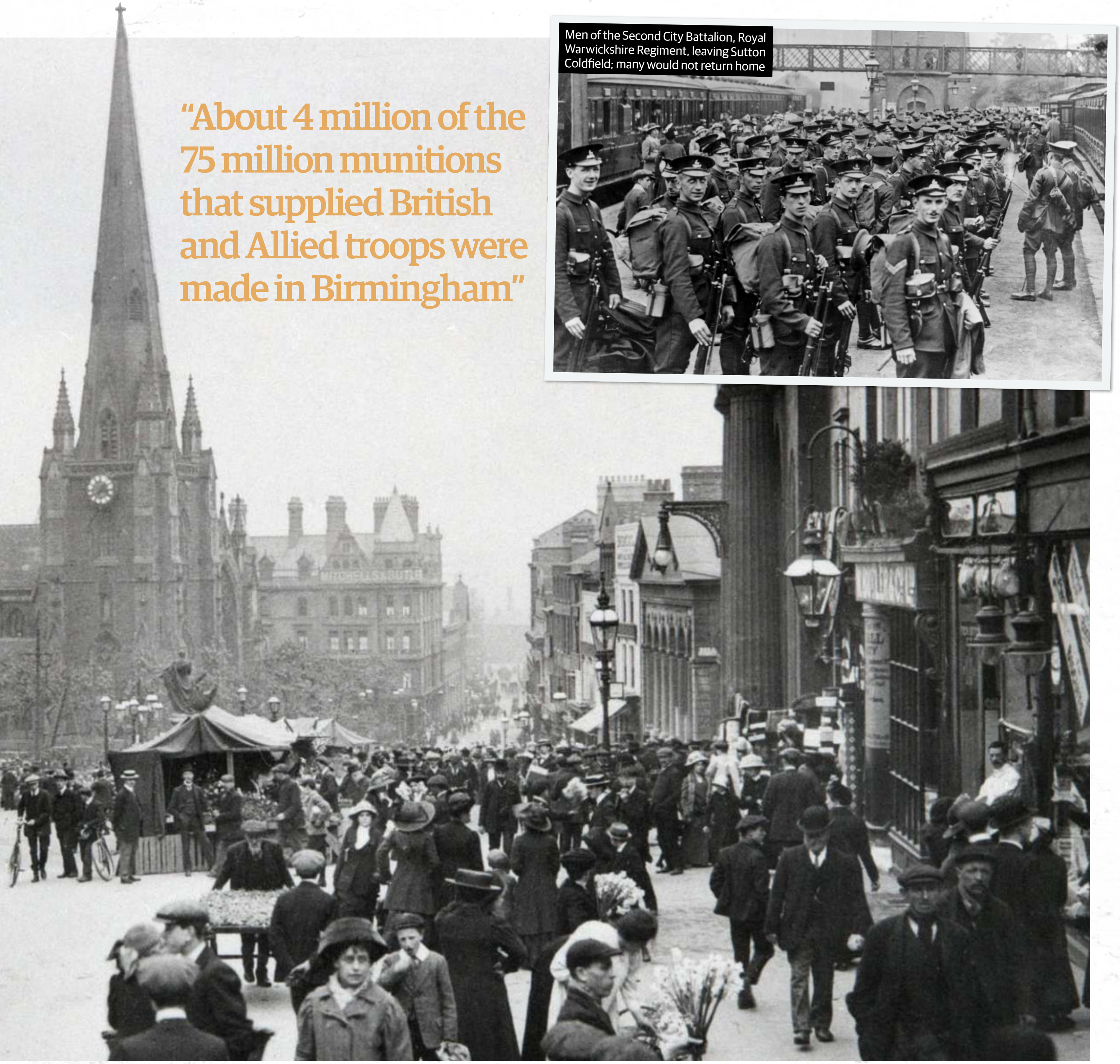
It was clear that the Public Works Committee wasn't quite up to the job, so responsibility shifted to a new Public Works and Town Planning Committee. New estates were built, and by

A photo of Birmingham's High Street looking towards St Martin's Church, in the early 20th century



A Birmingham canal, circa 1920. Britain's canal networks were in decline, but usage increased during the world wars to transport raw materials and munitions around the country

"About 4 million of the 75 million munitions that supplied British and Allied troops were made in Birmingham"



Men of the Second City Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment, leaving Sutton Coldfield; many would not return home

1926, 13,000 council homes were completed. Most of them were on the outskirts of the city, with the committee wanting to move people out to the suburbs. Nonetheless, a 1935 survey showed that 13.5 percent of Brummies were still living in overcrowded situations, although this was definitely an underestimate thanks to a loose legislative definition.

The city centre itself was a business and commerce hub, and highly industrial – it was little wonder Birmingham was a major target during the Blitz, becoming the third most heavily bombed city after London and Liverpool. Knowing that inner city crowding was still a huge issue, new plans were being drawn up to build 37,000 new homes over five years, with 15,000 of them being flats and maisonettes. It was a grand idea, which was unfortunately scuppered by Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939.

While the living conditions in Birmingham were less than healthy, the city's hospitals would go on to play a major role in rehabilitation as WWI wore on. Following the declaration of war on 4 August 1914, the Royal Army Medical Corps Territorial Unit was immediately tasked with setting up a hospital. Buildings of the University of Birmingham were transformed into the First Southern General Hospital, and its first patients – 120 sick and wounded men – arrived on 1 September. With 800 beds, by the end of 1914, the hospital had received 3,892 patients. Highbury Hall opened as a military hospital on 28 May 1915.

Life in Birmingham was far from great. With so many people crammed into the city centre and little money to be had, it became a hotbed for crime. The smoke from the factories and the loud noises of steam hammers made conditions even worse. It doesn't take much to imagine why gangs would try to take control of what they could.

Images: Alamy, Getty

SERIES ONE

SECRET TUNNEL WARS

Below the killing fields of the Western Front in 1916, a little-known struggle also took place in silence and shadows

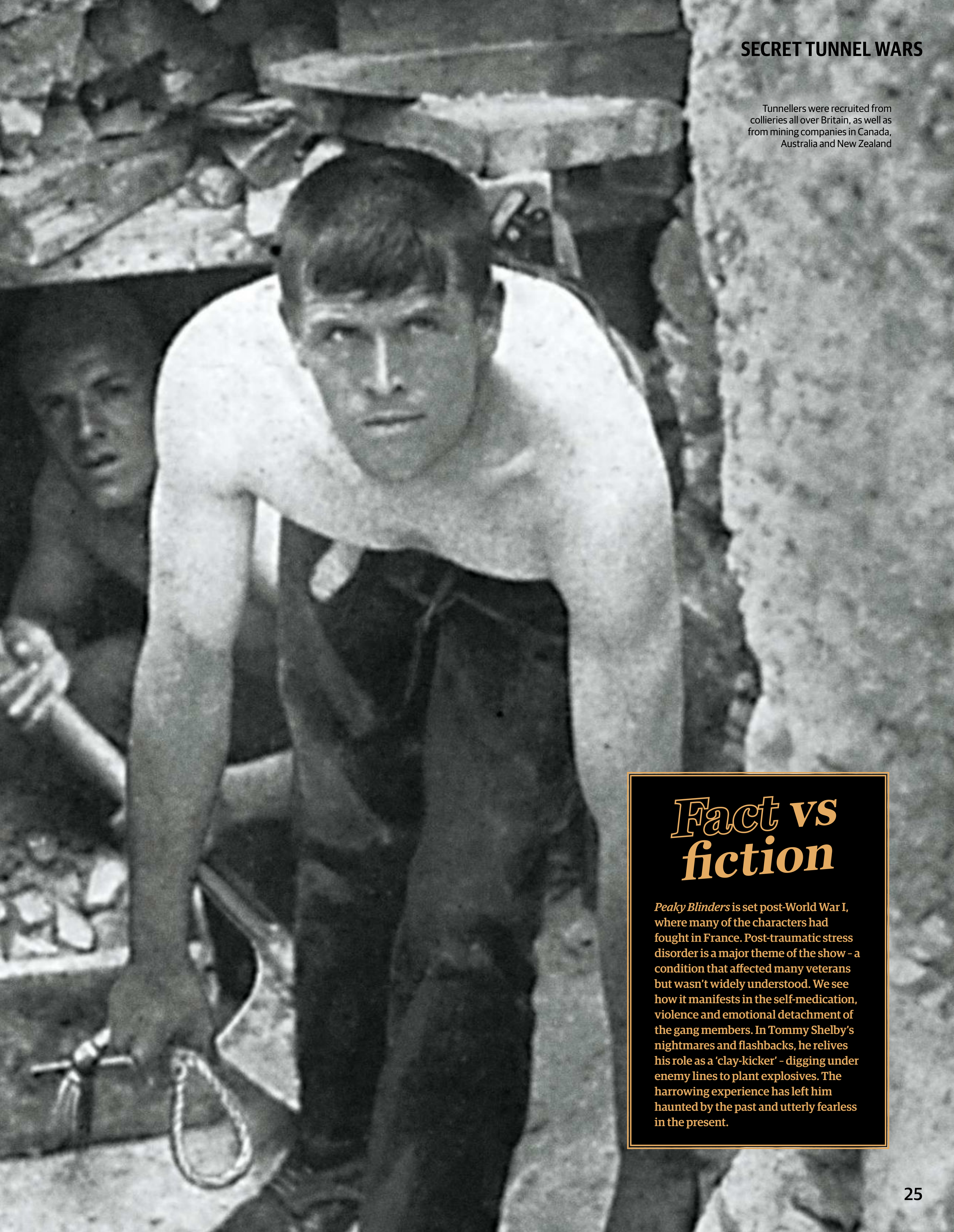
Words Nick Soldinger

On the morning of 1 July 1916, British fighter pilot Cecil Lewis was flying over La Boisselle in the Somme Valley. The seconds were ticking down to what would become Britain's biggest military catastrophe. By dusk, the fields below would be choked with more than 58,000 British casualties.

At 7.28am, his plane was flung suddenly sideways. "The whole earth heaved and flashed," he later recalled. "A tremendous column rose into the sky. There was an ear-splitting roar, drowning all the guns. The earth rose 4,000 feet. There it hung like the silhouette of some great cypress tree, then fell away in a widening cone of dust and debris."

What Lewis had just witnessed was, at the time, the loudest human-made blast in history. A 60,000-pound mine below the German line had erupted, a mighty herald of the slaughter to come. Within minutes, whistles were blown in the British trenches and, with bayonets fixed, a generation of young men clambered into no-man's land and set off on their one-way journey into oblivion.

The mine came as a surprise to everyone. Everyone, that is, except British high command, the specialist tunnellers who'd worked for months to sneak it under German boots, and tragically, it would transpire, the Germans themselves.



Tunnellers were recruited from collieries all over Britain, as well as from mining companies in Canada, Australia and New Zealand

Fact vs fiction

Peaky Blinders is set post-World War I, where many of the characters had fought in France. Post-traumatic stress disorder is a major theme of the show – a condition that affected many veterans but wasn't widely understood. We see how it manifests in the self-medication, violence and emotional detachment of the gang members. In Tommy Shelby's nightmares and flashbacks, he relives his role as a 'clay-kicker' – digging under enemy lines to plant explosives. The harrowing experience has left him haunted by the past and utterly fearless in the present.

WHO WERE THE TUNNELLERS?

Many of these subterranean warriors weren't as young as the soldiers dying above ground, but veterans of Britain's great industrial age

The men who'd dug their way under the German lines at La Boisselle were rejects. Many had tried enlisting in the army but had been turned down for being too old. These tunnellers, and others like them, were mostly in their 40s, and all highly skilled miners. Many had been as young as 13 when they'd started work and had spent more than 30 years toiling underground. As the trench system on the Western Front locked the fighting into a deadly stalemate, these former has-beens were now recruited en masse to literally undermine the enemy position.

Military mining is as old as siege warfare, but the British Army had no dedicated mining units when war broke out. In fact, it took a civilian entrepreneur to point out the potential for tunnellers to break the deadlock.

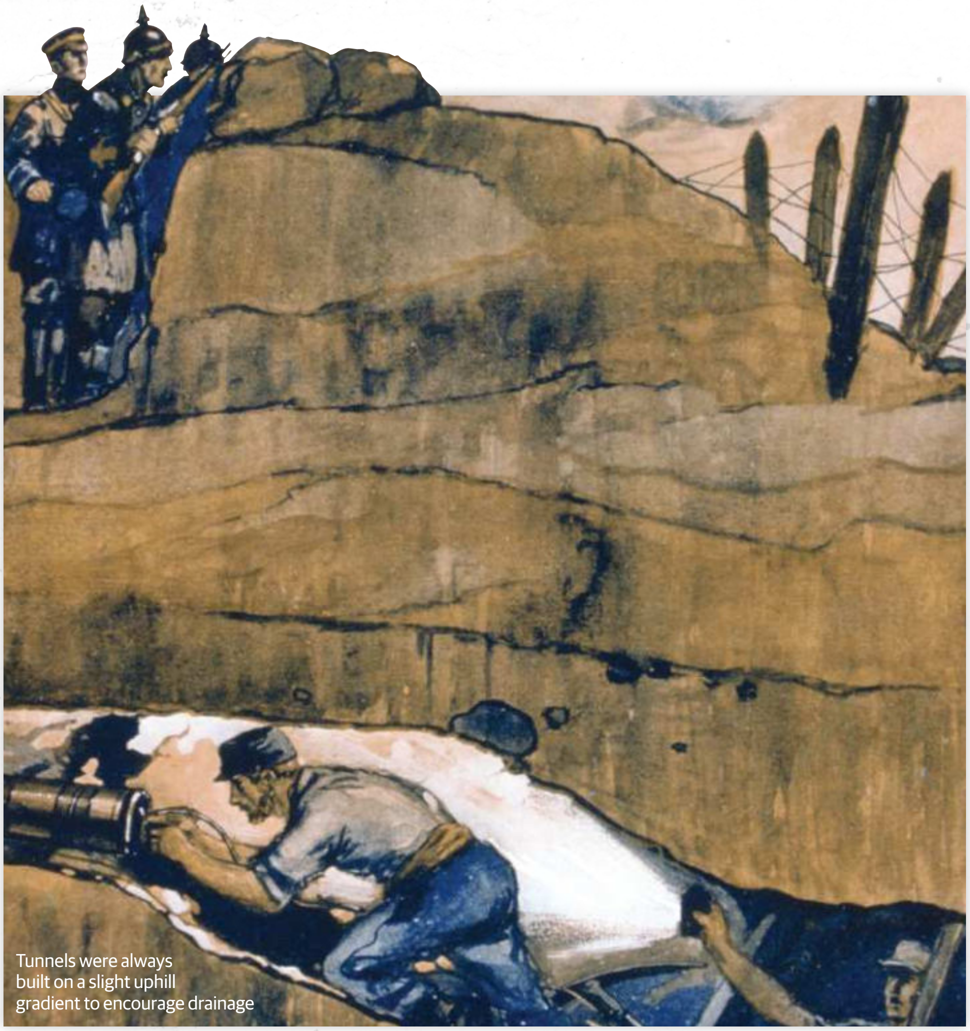
Sir John Norton-Griffiths owned a large engineering firm that was busy extending Manchester's sewer system when hostilities began. In his employment were hundreds of 'clay-kickers', skilled labourers whose job it was to excavate the earthworks. These men, he realised, could be used to tunnel silently and quickly under German trenches to plant explosives. So he wrote to the secretary of state for war, Lord Kitchener, to explain how his 'moles', as he called his men, might break what was fast becoming the biggest siege in history.

Initially, Kitchener showed no interest, but when the Germans did exactly what Norton-Griffiths was proposing and blew up British trenches in Givenchy in December 1914, he summoned the entrepreneur to Whitehall. Norton-Griffiths was then instructed to raise an army of tunnellers. The first men he recruited, naturally enough, were his own moles, and on 18 February 1915, 18 Manchester clay-kickers arrived at Brompton Barracks in Kent, home of the Royal Engineers. Here, they were given medicals, thrust into uniform and, with zero military training, packed off to France. 36 hours later they were under the Givenchy earth, digging defensive tunnels against the Germans. Just days before, the ground above them had been busy with car klaxons, trams and horses' hooves; now it shook from shell fire.

The clay-kickers, however, were only useful in areas where the soil was soft. In places like the Somme Valley where the geology was harder, a different skill set was required. So Norton-Griffiths began looking further than his own workforce. In the collieries across Britain and beyond, he found his army of subterranean soldiers.

> "As the trench system on the Western Front locked the fighting into a deadly stalemate, these former has-beens were now recruited en masse to literally undermine the enemy position"

French trench diggers, part of the army construction corps called sappers, emerge from one of the tunnels they are digging at the Western Front in July 1916



Tunnels were always built on a slight uphill gradient to encourage drainage

A HERO 80 FEET UNDER

When the world literally collapsed around him, one man risked everything to save the life of his fellow miner

William Hackett was a typical tunneller. Rejected by the army three times for having a weakened heart, the Nottinghamshire miner was finally accepted into the Royal Engineers in October 1915.

Born in 1873, Hackett had grown up in the slums of Nottingham and - by the time the Great War broke out - he had been working down the pits for 23 years.

In June 1916, in Givenchy-lès-la-Bassée, shortly after his 43rd birthday, Hackett and four other men were entombed when an underground blast triggered by Germans digging the other way caused the tunnel they were in to collapse.

Rescuers managed to reach the men and dig all but one of them out. The fifth, however, a 22-year-old from Swansea named Thomas Collins, was injured and unreachable. Although Hackett could easily have escaped at that time, he refused to leave his young comrade, saying: "I am a tunneller and I must look after the others first."

He stayed underground with Collins while other tunnellers struggled to rescue him, but the blast had rendered the whole tunnel system deeply unstable. Four days into the rescue attempt, it collapsed, and both Collins and Hackett were buried alive.

Hackett was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross for his act of selfless bravery - the only tunneller of the war to receive Britain's highest military honour. Speaking years later about her husband's heroism, his widow Alice said: "I could never understand the doctors rejecting him on account of his heart. There wasn't much wrong with that, was there?"

> "Although Hackett could easily have escaped, he refused to leave his young comrade, saying: I am a tunneller and I must look after the others first"

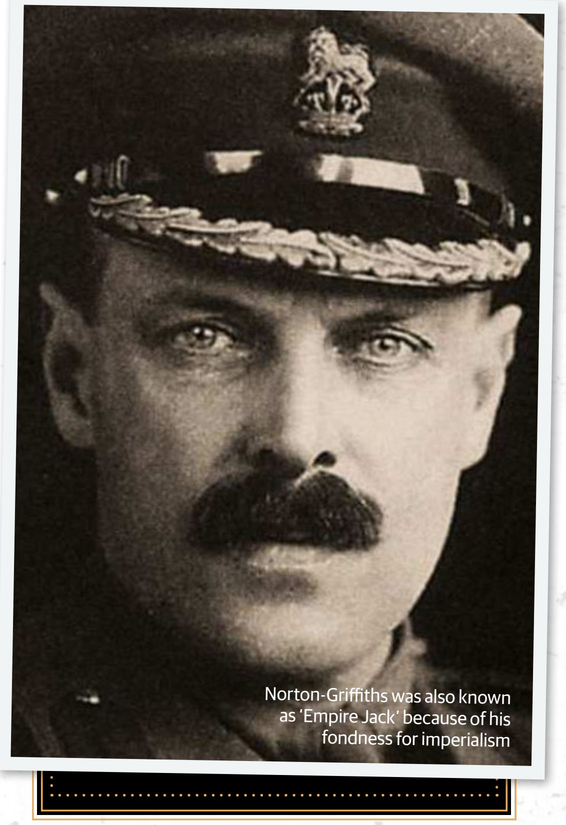
Hellfire Jack

Sir John Norton-Griffiths, the man who inspired the British tunnellers, was an Edwardian celebrity. Born in 1875, this swashbuckling adventurer, whose ferocious temper earned him the nickname Hellfire Jack, started life as the son of a lowly clerk. He ran away from home aged 17, and after a brief stint in the army headed to Africa to work as manager of a gold mine.

When the Boer War broke out, he re-enlisted, ending the conflict as a personal bodyguard to the British commander-in-chief. A series of huge engineering projects then followed, and he returned to Britain a rich man to take up a seat in Parliament.

At the outbreak of World War I, he raised a cavalry regiment at his own expense and had himself commissioned into it as a major, before turning his attention to tunnelling.

Known for touring the battlefields in a wine-laden Rolls-Royce, Norton-Griffiths was as eccentric as he was dynamic. His other significant wartime contribution was almost single-handedly stopping a German advance in 1916 by sabotaging 70 Romanian oil refineries. He ended the war as a lieutenant colonel, and was knighted in 1922. He died in 1930 in Egypt, having either shot himself or been murdered, possibly by Romanians.



Norton-Griffiths was also known as 'Empire Jack' because of his fondness for imperialism

WAR UNDER THE GROUND

The quiet and cautious soldiers faced no less peril than those up top

The subterranean world carved out by both the British and Germans on the Western Front was an elaborate network of tunnels, galleries and chambers. Here, deep beneath the roar of battle above, men terrified of discovery toiled in total silence, picking their way centimetre by centimetre towards each other's lines. Working with shovel and bayonet in spaces often as narrow as a man's shoulders, they crawled, dug, scraped and fought their way through the ancient layers of earth.

① Tunnel entrance

② Shaft house
In this timber construction, rubble and soil would be hauled from below in sandbags by a winch and pulley, which would then be transported to the surface by a wooden trolley. Everything had to be shifted by hand.

③ Steel shaft
The presence of quicksand in the soil's stratum along some parts of the front meant that only shallow tunnels could be dug. The British solved this problem by using cylindrical steel shafts known as tubbing to help them reach the firmer ground beneath.

④ Timber shaft
Once firmer ground had been reached, timber was used again to complete the mine shaft. In fact, timber was used throughout the mines as a way of shoring up the walls to help prevent them from collapsing in on the tunnellers.

⑤ Listening post
These were used to detect enemy tunnelling. Early listening equipment such as the Geophone could detect German digging up to 30 metres away. It replaced more primitive techniques like watching for vibrations in water standing in a biscuit tin.

⑥ Mine chamber under construction

⑦ Tunnelling team
Tunnellers worked in three-man teams that consisted of the clay-kicker or miner who dug the earth, the bagger who filled sandbags with soil and the trammer who transported the bags out of the gallery. Working in silence was essential.

⑧ Completed deep tunnel
Thanks to the steel tubbing and the superior skills of the British tunnellers, who dug about eight metres per day compared to the Germans' rate of two, some British tunnels were up to 37 metres deep and 658 metres long.

⑨ Sandbag wall
Known as tamping, these were erected at the entrance of completed mine chambers. Stuffed full of soil and rock, these hessian sacks were packed tightly together and designed to force the blast vertically, up into the German lines above.

⑩ Mine chamber

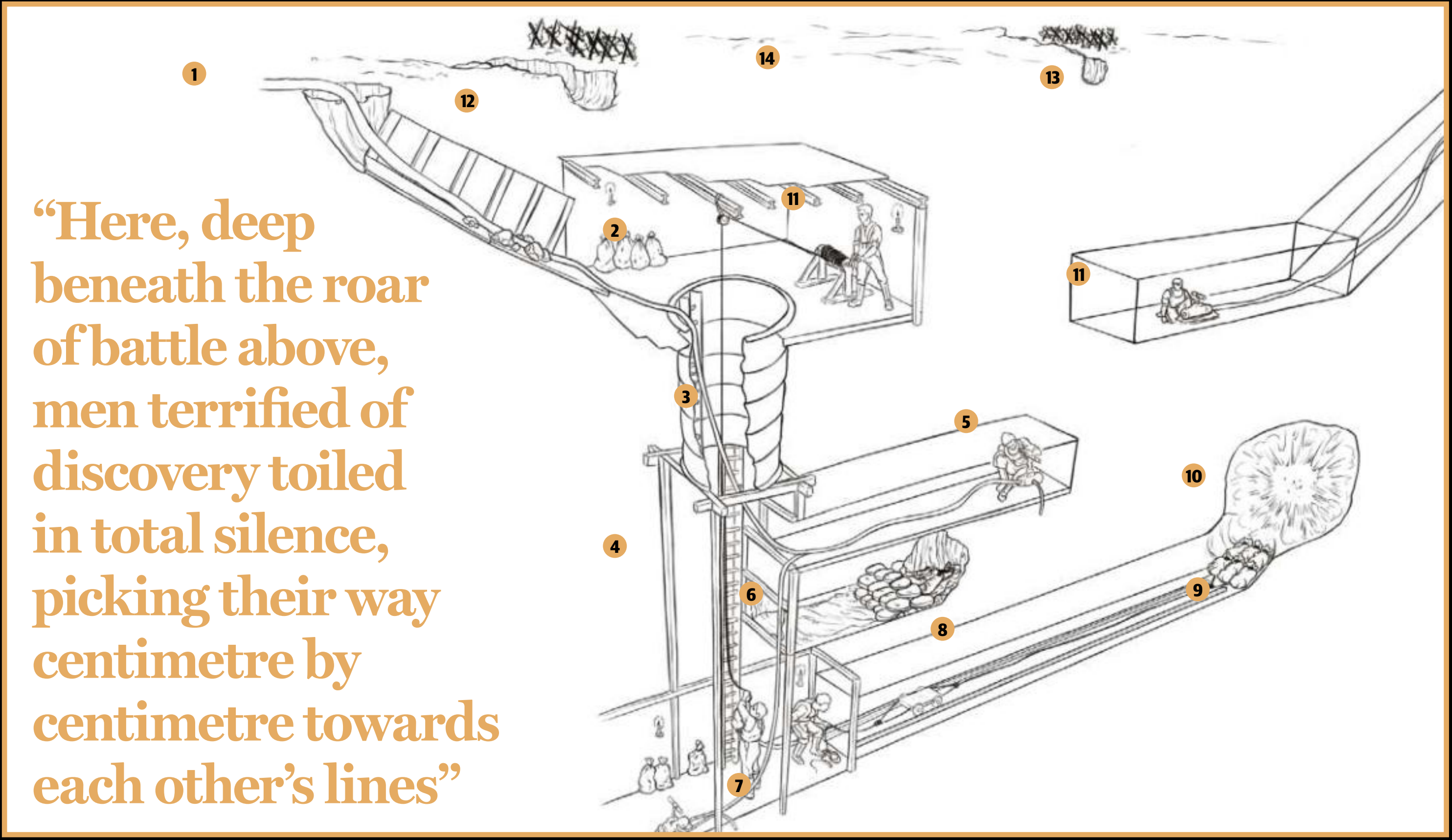
⑪ German listening post Among the German equipment used to detect British tunnellers was the Moritz system, which could pick up electrical impulses in the earth. Its presence was to prove crucial to the outcome of the Battle of the Somme.

⑫ British trench

⑬ German trench

⑭ No-man's land

The tunnels were built with the same techniques and to the same standards that the professional miners used in civilian life



> "Here, deep beneath the roar of battle above, men terrified of discovery toiled in total silence, picking their way centimetre by centimetre towards each other's lines"

TUNNELLING UNDER THE SOMME

In 1916, the tunnellers went on the offensive, spearheading what would turn out to be Britain's costliest attack of all time

For many of the British killed on 1 July, the assault at the Somme was their first experience of combat

In an effort to break the deadlock of trench warfare, in 1916 the British made plans for a summer offensive. The generals looked at the map and pointed to the village of La Boisselle in the Somme valley. It stood on a salient in the German line. Punch holes either side of it with mines and artillery then send the infantry through the gaps, and you'll force the Germans out of their trenches and into open battle. At least, that was the theory.

The two points of attack were codenamed Y-Sap and Lochnagar, and the responsibility of reaching them underground fell to the 179th Tunnelling Company, who began excavating the 300-metre-long tunnels immediately. By early summer they'd made good progress, but as they approached a line of German listening posts, they were forced to work even more cautiously. Shovels and picks were swapped for bayonets attached to shovel handles. These were used to ease out lumps of chalk that were then caught by another tunneller before they could hit the ground.

It was painstaking work, and the attack was postponed until 1 July. When it became clear that the Lochnagar tunnel still wouldn't be completed by then, it was stopped short. Two huge mine chambers were then excavated at its end and filled with 24 tons of explosive. A similar amount was planted under the completed Y-Sap tunnel.

Above ground, meanwhile, a giant artillery barrage had begun. For seven days British guns pounded the Germans continuously, firing more than 1.7 million shells. Nothing could survive such an onslaught - or so British High Command believed - and it would be a walkover. The German dugouts, however, were deep, and their troops sheltered inside them patiently. They knew the bombardment couldn't last forever. They also knew an assault would start when it stopped - they just didn't know when.

Then, on the night of 30 June, they found out. In a German listening post, a Moritz machine picked up a telephone message to British troops holding the line. It said: "Good luck tomorrow morning." With those four words, the unwitting well wisher condemned thousands of his countrymen to death.

At 7.28am the following morning, the barrage stopped. As British infantrymen lined up in front of their trench ladders, they heard two more explosions - louder than anything they had ever heard. It was the two tunnel mines either side of La Boisselle, and within two minutes they were crossing no-man's land towards the huge craters that had been created.

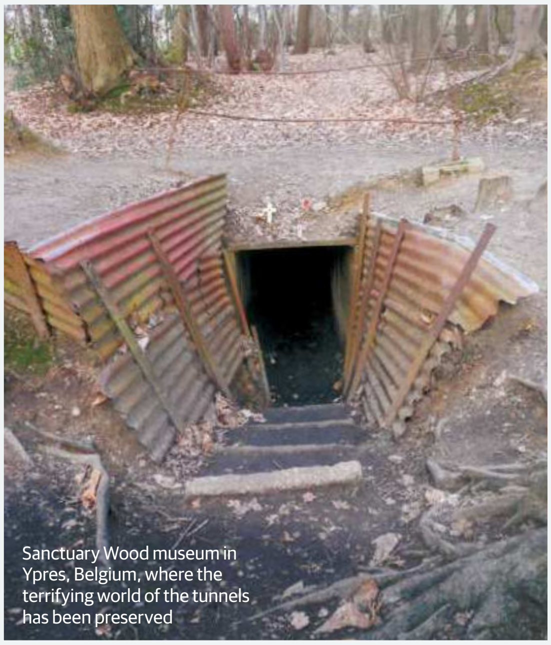
Before they had got 100 metres, though, the Germans began scything them down. Forewarned by the intercepted message, they'd moved their all-important machine-gun defences from Y-Sap, distributing them throughout their line. As soon as the bombardment had ceased, they'd then swarmed back into their trenches just as thousands of British troops walked into their gun sights. By noon, more than 11,000 British soldiers lay dead either side of La Boisselle. The village was supposed to have fallen within 20 minutes, instead it took six days. The Battle of the Somme, meanwhile, raged on for another four months.

What happened to the tunnellers?

Working for up to 12 hours a day in tense silence, life was tough and dangerous for the tunnellers. Every day they faced the same hazards underground. The tunnels were freezing and frequently rat infested or flooded. Fatigue, trench foot, and vitamin D deficiency all sapped their strength. The risk of cave-ins was ever present, as was the danger from asphyxiation or explosions caused by underground gases.

Then there was the threat of the Germans. Always listening, always waiting, maybe just on the other side of a slender wall of earth, to kill them. If tunnels collided, it meant cramped, candle-lit combat with knives, knuckle-dusters and bludgeons. If they didn't, the enemy had explosives. Once a tunnel was detected, a hole was silently drilled towards it, a steel tube called a camouflet packed with explosive inserted, and detonated. Those on the other side then either became trapped, or drowned in mud.

When the war became more mobile from 1917 onwards, the tunnellers were moved above ground to more mundane tasks. And when the war ended, those that had survived were packed off home to their pits and their sewers, while those that didn't remained, entombed forever in the deadly labyrinths they had painstakingly dug below the Western Front.


Sanctuary Wood museum in Ypres, Belgium, where the terrifying world of the tunnels has been preserved

Images: Alamy, Corbis, Mary Evans, Rebekka Hearl

SERIES ONE

THE REAL BILLY KIMBER

How the ruthless head of the Birmingham Boys gang beat off his rivals to secure the spoils of the racecourse protection rackets

Words Neil Crossley

One evening in 2013, a 55-year-old exam invigilator called Juliet Banyard from Birmingham was watching a TV programme called *Gangs of Britain* with her family, when she heard mention of her great-grandfather William 'Billy' Kimber. Banyard was aware that her grandfather had been a bookmaker, but the account of his life that unfurled as she watched came as a complete surprise.

Banyard learned that from 1910 to 1930, Kimber had been one of the most powerful gangsters in England. "Our ears pricked up at that and, from there, it's all snowballed," she told *The Birmingham Mail* in 2014. "It's been a bit of a revelation for us. We knew my great-grandfather Billy Kimber was a famous Birmingham bookie, but we didn't realise the extent of his infamy. We never knew the whole tale until now."

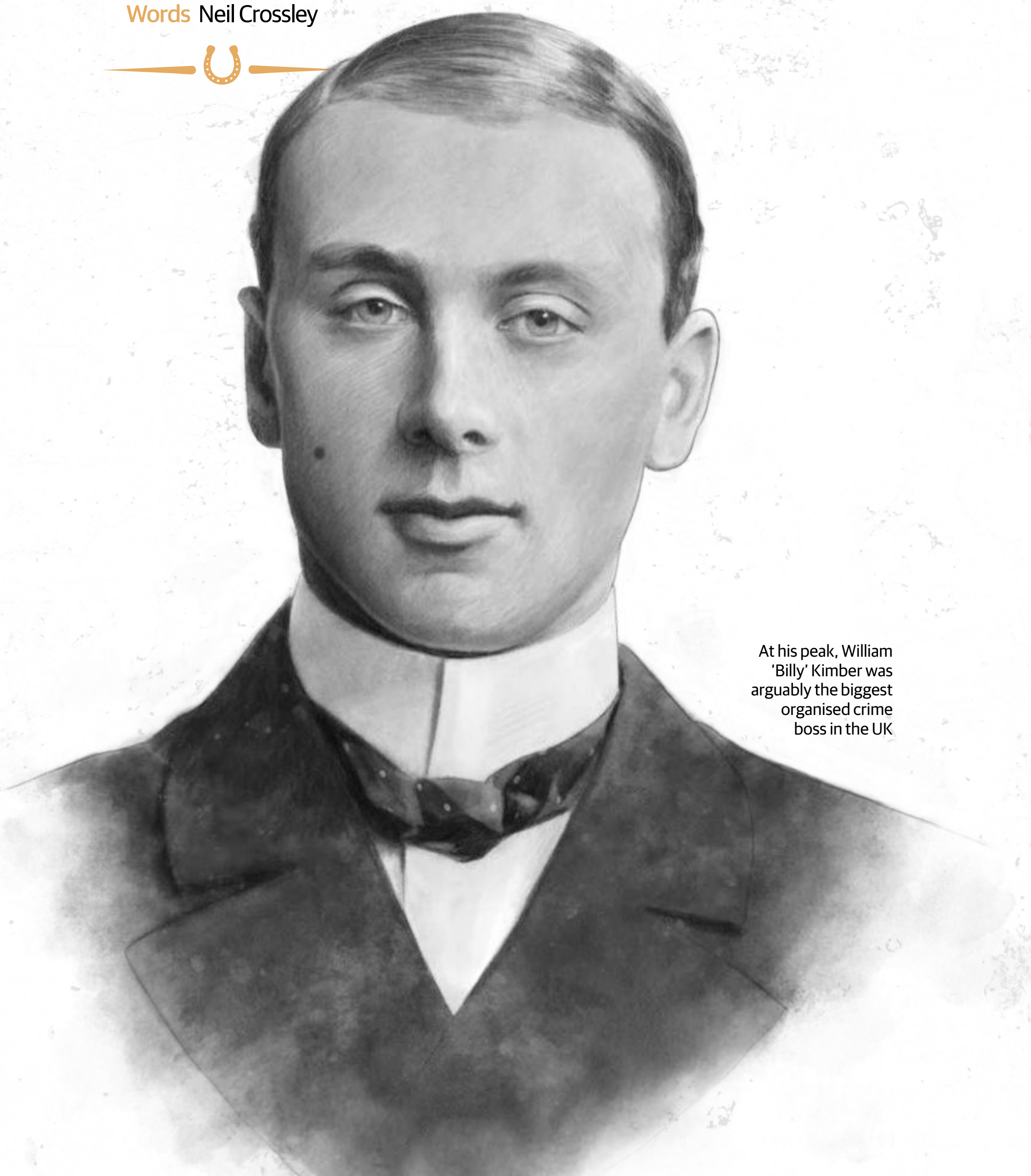
RAPID RISE

Few UK gangland bosses in the first half of the 20th century attained such power as Billy Kimber. Born in 1882 in Aston, Birmingham, he was a former member of the Peaky Blinders gang who formed his own much bigger street gang, the Birmingham Boys, also known as the Brummagem Boys.

Kimber had both brains and brawn, spotting lucrative illicit opportunities and possessing the strategic nous to carry them out. He was handsome, well built and charismatic, and a natural leader. By 1910, the Birmingham Boys was the largest street gang in the Midlands and had ousted the Peaky Blinders in a series of bloody turf wars.

THE RACECOURSE WARS

By 1913, Kimber was targeting racecourses, offering protection to the bookmakers who controlled all



At his peak, William 'Billy' Kimber was arguably the biggest organised crime boss in the UK the cash. After World War I, racecourse attendances reached record levels and bookmakers were intimidated by gangsters to share their profits, which led to violent rivalry between gangs.

Billy Kimber controlled racecourses across the Midlands and the North, and by 1919 had turned his attention to London and the South East. He and his gang charged bookmakers as much as 50 percent of their profits in exchange for conducting their business unmolested.

The Birmingham Boys began preying on the Jewish bookmakers in London's East End. These bookmakers sought help from local underworld boss Edward Emmanuel, who in turn recruited the Italian Sabini Gang as protection.

VIOLENT CONFLICT

So began a series of intensely violent conflicts that became known as the Racecourse Wars, which continued from 1920 to 1925. In March 1921, the Birmingham Boys ambushed the head of the Sabini gang, Charles 'Darby' Sabini, at Greenford Trotting Park in Ealing. A few days later, Kimber was found shot and beaten in Kings Cross.

East End gangster Alfred Solomon was tried for unlawful wounding of Kimber, but the case was dropped when Kimber testified that the shooting had been an accident. The recuperating Kimber was determined to put on a show of strength in the south of England. He did so on Saturday 4 April 1921 at Alexandra Park, in a pitched battle led by his London friend George 'Brummie' Sage.

Here, the Birmingham Boys met the Sabini gang head on. *The Times* bemoaned the "disgraceful" scenes caused by "a very large number of rogues", noting that "they, of course, cannot fight cleanly so they used knives… and apparently pistols".

The members of both gangs clashed again by Mornington Crescent tube station on 20 April 1921. On 2 June 1921, violence erupted once more in what became known as the Epsom Road Battle. On that day, a vehicle carrying ten bookmakers and their assistants home from the 1921 Epsom Derby meeting was rammed by over 30 members of the Birmingham Boys, who attacked its occupants with hammers, iron bars, razors, spanners, hatchets and bricks.

The Birmingham Boys gang believed they were ambushing members of the Sabini gang but had mistakenly attacked their own allies, from Leeds. 28 of the Birmingham Boys gang were arrested and 17 received prison sentences. It was a spectacular own goal by Kimber and his gang, which gave the Sabini gang the upper hand and resulted in the Birmingham Boys being ultimately ousted from power.

LASTING LEGACY

The violent confrontations continued, but Kimber's influence diminished. In 1927 he left for America after firing shots through the door of a drinking club used by the Sabinis. He first settled in Phoenix, Arizona, where he allegedly killed a man who owed him money, before moving to Los Angeles and then Chicago. There, he was hidden by his friend, Murray Humphreys, a member of Al Capone's gang. He returned to England in 1929, where he set himself up as a legitimate bookmaker.

Billy Kimber as played by Charlie Creed-Miles in *Peaky Blinders*

In the first series of the show, arch enemies Thomas Shelby (Cillian Murphy) and Billy Kimber (Charlie Creed-Miles) battle for control of the racecourses

Given the violence and drama that permeated his life, Kimber's last years were surprisingly uneventful and sedate. He died aged 63 in 1942 at Mount Stuart nursing home in Torquay after a long illness.

Kimber's great-granddaughter, Juliet Banyard, recalled that her mother and the family were largely deserted by Kimber.

"When he died with his new family in Torquay, my mum and nan (Annie) went to visit but didn't have the nerve to knock on the door," she told *The Birmingham Mail*. "He deserted them, then went on to live a good life. Annie, my grandmother, and her sister Maude were left in poverty and they struggled. I know Nan couldn't bear his name but she died when I was little. They didn't speak of him much, maybe they were trying to keep it on the down low."

80 years on from his death, TV programmes and a strong public appetite for all things gangster-related have ensured that William 'Billy' Kimber's fame is far more widespread than it was in his own lifetime. He is notable for being probably the biggest organised crime boss of his era. For that alone, it seems likely that his legacy and infamy will prevail for generations to come.

Fact vs fiction

The BBC series *Peaky Blinders* elevated Kimber's infamy, but several details about the character in the series (played by Charlie Creed-Miles) are fictitious.

"Unlike in the TV series, where he is portrayed as a small Londoner, Kimber was actually a big, burly Brummie," explains Professor Carl Chinn, MBE, a historian and writer who has studied Birmingham gang culture.

Kimber's death is also far more dramatic in *Peaky Blinders*. In the series one finale, Kimber is shot dead by Tommy Shelby (Cillian Murphy) during a gang battle in 1919, whereas in reality he died in a nursing home in Torquay in 1945.

Images: Alamy, Getty, Kevin Mcgivern (illustration)

SERIES ONE

THE RISE AND FALL OF BRITISH COMMUNISM

Inspired by the Russian Revolution, the Communist Party of Great Britain never managed to shake its factionalism despite unifying the revolutionary left

Words Hareth Al Bustani

By the outbreak of the First World War, British class conflict was coming to a head. Between 1909 and 1914, union membership rose from 2.5 million to 4.5 million and industrial action was becoming increasingly commonplace. Although trade union leaders and the recently formed Labour Party were able to temporarily successfully stave off significant industrial unrest, as the conflict dragged on, workers toiling in increasingly authoritarian and inhumane conditions grew resentful of their profiteering employers and the politicians propping up the British imperialist war machine.

Among Britain's nascent socialist movement, as public sentiment turned against the war, some began to see their exploitation as an extension of the imperialist war machine - pitting them against their counterparts abroad for the benefit of the ruling classes. As the bloodshed dragged on, outspoken Marxists and revolutionaries in the factories, shipyards and pits were increasingly radicalised, directing their energies towards halting the war's dilution of labour, industrial conscription and rising prices.

This widespread spirit of discontent resulted in a rapid re-escalation in industrial action, which in 1917, led to the loss of more than 1 million working days. These strikes were of great concern to the government, Labour Party and right-wing industrialists alike, who sensed that they were being driven by increasingly radical and well-organised revolutionary elements within the labour force. Keen to nip the threat in the bud, the government began churning out propaganda, idealising British society and imperialism, while sending spies to identify radical socialists and pacifists.

The capitalist class's fears were only further cemented by how well the Russian Revolution had been received by pacifists and workers all across Europe. In March, more than 10,000 people attended a 'Russia Free!' celebration at the Royal Albert Hall, where a further 5,000 were turned away at the door. *The Herald*'s editor, George Lansbury, opened the meeting by stating: "This triumph has come, friends, because for the first time that I know of in history… working class soldiers have refused to fire on the workers", to a roaring ovation.

Fact vs fiction

Communism features throughout *Peaky Blinders*, from Tommy's war buddy Freddie Thorne (Iddo Goldberg) rallying fellow communist workers in series one, to real-life activist Jessie Eden (Charlie Murphy) in series four. In the first series, known communist Freddie becomes a prime suspect in the case of the missing guns from the Birmingham Small Arms Company, as the authorities fear that the weapons were stolen to arm the communists ready for an uprising. While Freddie's character and the circumstances are fictional, the storyline is based on very real concerns of a Russian-style revolution taking place in Britain at the time.

THE CHOICE OF MILLIONS
We shall have MOUSSEC
LOY MITCHUM
The Red Pony
PLAZA
BRAVINGTONS
SMT SCOTLAND
RANDALLS
TAKE THE SOCIALIST ROAD FOR BRITAIN-
SUPPORT THE COMMUNIST CANDIDATES
COMMUNIST PARTY
TOOLMAKERS

Although the Communist Party of Great Britain never quite went mainstream, for a moment it seemed that revolution just might take root in Britain too

That May, another meeting was convened by the United Socialist Council, comprising 1,150 delegates from trades councils, trade unions, the Labour Party, the Independent Labour Party and the British Socialist Party to discuss the implications of the Russian Revolution on Britain. Facing stiff opposition from the media, establishment, and even the city itself – where local hotels refused to accommodate delegates – the convention indicated a desire to follow in Russia's footsteps. Suffragette leader Sylvia Pankhurst said the event "voiced a growing deeply felt revolt against things as they are: the war with its hideous carnage, and the capitalist system, which perpetuates the war of exploitation and wage slavery".

Hoping to co-opt and calm this spirit, Labour launched the New Social Order, a programme that promised "to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the common ownership of the means of production". Committed to conservative reformism, it centred the party around trade unions, and launched local membership Constituency Labour Parties, in order to marginalise more radical elements, such as the Independent Labour Party.

Although the British public was sick of war, the capitalist ruling classes of Europe and the US wanted to set an example by suppressing and overthrowing the Russian Revolution – lest it excite tempers at home. Britain not only left soldiers in Russia, but began creating counter-revolutionary units, with the then-minister of munitions, Winston Churchill, remarking that he would "very much like" to gas the Bolsheviks. However, to the amazement of the Allied leaders, many British, French and American soldiers simply mutinied and refused to fight the Russians.

Amid this spirit of defiance, those on the fringes of Britain's fractured far-left movement sensed an opportunity, as the brief post-war boom was followed by economic devastation, with unemployment doubling to 2 million. One of the largest groups were the British Socialist Party (BSP), which had splintered from the country's first socialist organisation, the Social-Democratic Federation (SDF). However, the BSP was largely seen as a Marxist propagandist movement, limited to spreading intellectual dogma, rather than any direct action. Another offshoot of the SDF was the Socialist Labour Party, founded in Glasgow's troublesome industrial hub of Clydeside in opposition to reformism. Prominent in industrial centres such as Sheffield and Tyneside, the group rejected any deviations from their purist interpretation of Marxism.

Elsewhere, Sylvia Pankhurst's East End's Workers' Socialist Federation was committed to revolutionary action, hostile to Labour and parliament alike. In 1919, Lenin wrote to Pankhurst, urging her to unite with the various other leftist splinter groups, such as the Glasgow Women's Peace Crusade, to engage in parliamentary and industrial action.

While most British workers embraced Labour's reformist approach to capitalist imperialism, socialist revolutionaries believed that no true change could be achieved through the trade unions. When workers united together based on craft and trade – rather than industry and class – it allowed the ruling classes to divide and conquer, buying peace wherever conflict arose.

Among Britain's earliest communist leaders was suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst, who Lenin personally encouraged to help form a unified communist party

"Sylvia Pankhurst's East End's Workers' Socialist Federation was committed to revolutionary action; hostile to Labour and parliament alike"

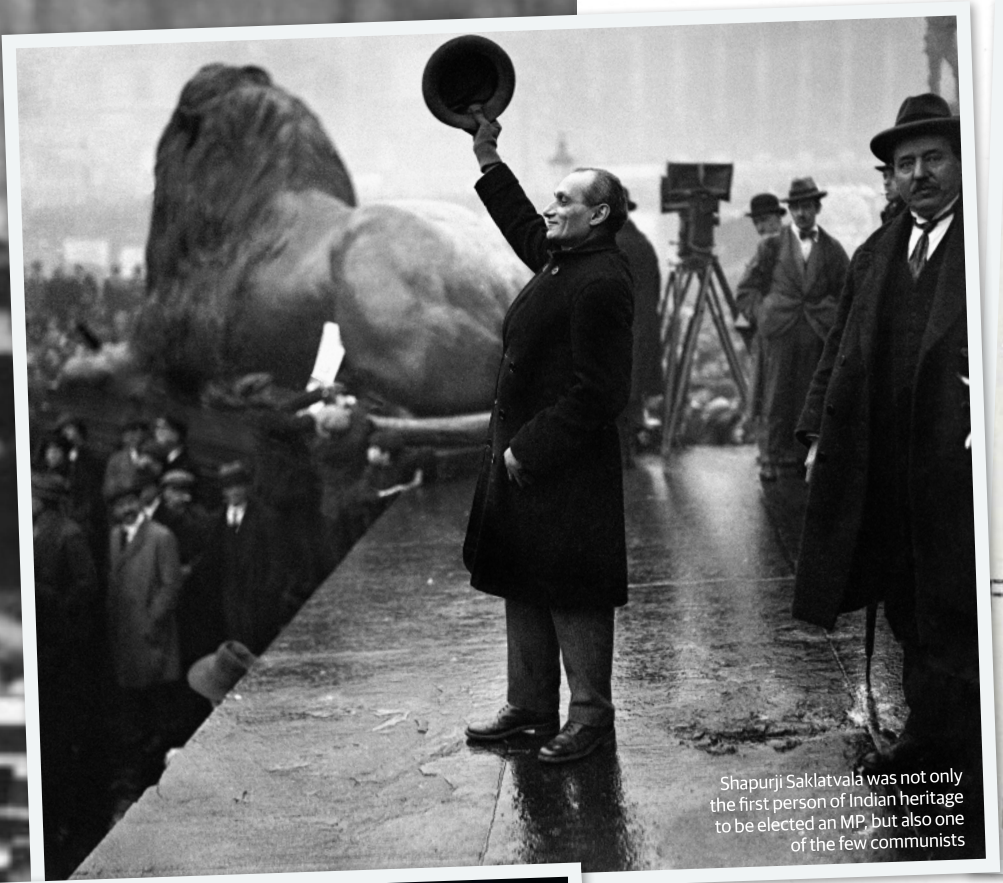
By now, strike action was reaching its highest levels in British history; when 100,000 Glasgow engineers struck for a 40-hour week, and 35,000 demonstrated in George Square, the city was occupied by English tanks and soldiers. Speaking at the Second Communist International in 1920, Lenin encouraged Britain's disparate revolutionary groups to band together, and even to affiliate with the Labour Party, despite it being led by "the worst kind of reactionaries at that, who act quite in the spirit of the bourgeoisie".

On 31 July 1920, at the Communist Unity Convention, 160 delegates voted to form the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB). Party membership rapidly grew to 2,500 people, including several continental immigrants and exiles, as well as Irish revolutionaries, hardened by the fight for independence. Aside from working class leaders of Irish origin, such as the Red Clyde and Shop Stewards' leader, Willie Gallacher, there were also professionals like Colonel L'Estrange Malone, who was a Coalition Liberal MP. Also sympathetic was the South Wales Miners Federation, who in 1921, joined the Red International of Labour Unions to support the Third International, as well as the suffragettes, prohibitionists and guild socialists.

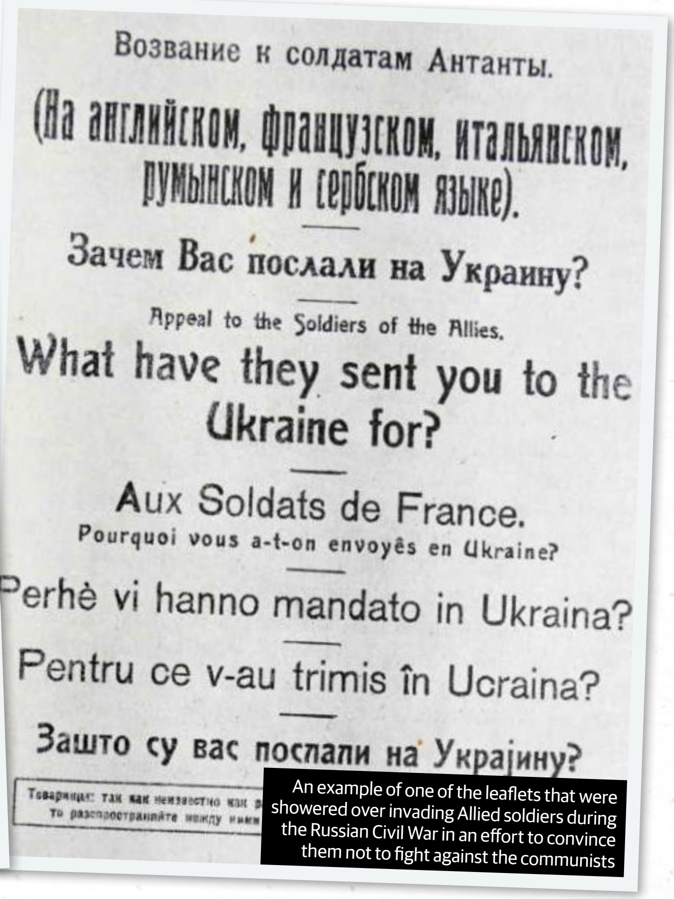
With time, the ranks also swelled with intellectuals, and unemployed workers, lured in by the National Workers' Committee Movement, the party's propaganda mouthpiece. Yet much of the workforce still fell out of reach. Struggling to adopt Bolshevik models of organisation within a Social-Democratic framework, the party translated Comintern's code of procedures with the help of Mikhail Borodin – a Comintern agent who lived under the guise of 'George Brown', until being caught and deported. The party subsequently adopted a harder line, calling for every single member to play an active role in political and industrial action, ruled over with a heavily centralised, top-down hierarchy. However, its membership was too small for this to be rolled out on a wide scale, and intellectuals began to drift away.

Despite the election of two communists to Parliament in 1922 – with the Indian Parsi Shapurji Saklatvala going on to sit as a Labour MP in Battersea North for five years – the party continued to flounder. Labour repeatedly rejected the party's applications for affiliation and in 1925 even banned communists from maintaining membership in local parties. Communists also struggled to make an impact on industry, with most unions seeing affiliation with the Red International of Labour Unions as an attempt to split the movement.

Within factories – where they had hoped to organise like-minded individuals – as unemployment soared, those who were lucky enough to find work were terrified of being victimised. Increasingly impatient with progress, Moscow became ever more hands



Shapurji Saklatvala was not only the first person of Indian heritage to be elected an MP, but also one of the few communists



Возвание к солдатам Антанты.

(На английском, французском, итальянском, румынском и сербском языке).

Зачем Вас послали на Украину?

Appeal to the Soldiers of the Allies.

What have they sent you to the Ukraine for?

Aux Soldats de France.

Pourquoi vous a-t-on envoyés en Ukraine?

Perhè vi hanno mandato in Ukraina?

Pentru ce v-au trimis în Ucraina?

Зашто су вас послали на Украjину?

An example of one of the leaflets that were showered over invading Allied soldiers during the Russian Civil War in an effort to convince them not to fight against the communists

Peaky Blinders touches on the rise of communism – and the fear of it – through the storylines of Freddie Thorne (Iddo Goldberg) and Ada Shelby (Sophie Rundle)

on, offering funds, and even encouraging the party to establish the National Minority Movement to seize control of unions.

In 1945, for the first time in two decades, two communists were again elected to Parliament, including the charismatic leader and founding member of the CPGB, Willie Gallacher. That year, the party won more than 100,000 votes, with its 21 candidates scoring an average of 14.6 percent of the vote. The next year, communists also earned more than half a million votes in local council elections. However, as the Cold War heated up, communists were banned from taking office, triggering a massive slump in party support; a decline that was exacerbated by Khrushchev's shocking 1956 speech revealing Stalin's dictatorial excesses.

After the USSR's brutal response to the Hungarian Uprising that same year, British communist membership dropped by one-third. Although the party retained some clout during the industrial strife of the 1970s, continued infighting led to increasing factionalism and breakout groups diluting the base. As Labour began drifting right, towards the 'New Labour' movement, the communist party continued to decline, before finally buckling and disintegrating shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union itself.

The Russian Revolution

In February 1917, amid the endlessly brutal First World War, massive inflation and food shortages, the Russian city of Petrograd was overwhelmed with a series of major strikes, demonstrations and mutinies. Disgruntled workers and soldiers banded together to form the Petrograd Soviet, in direct opposition to the authority of Tsar Nicholas II, who was forced to abdicate, handing power to the Provisional Government led primarily by the more moderate socialist groups, the Mensheviks and Socialist Revolutionaries.

Soon afterwards, leading figures from the more hard-line Bolshevik group began to return from exile, including the prolific political revolutionary Vladimir Lenin. As the Provisional Government floundered, the Bolshevik policy of 'peace, bread and land' found fertile ears among desperate labourers, peasants and troops. Tension came to a head in October, when the Bolshevik Red Guards stormed the city's Winter Palace and arrested the Provisional Government, which Lenin proclaimed as a victory in the name of the revolution.

Lenin celebrates in Red Square in October 1917, having successfully wrenched power from the Provisional Government

In the ensuing years, much blood was shed as the Bolsheviks cracked down brutally on their domestic opponents while staving off foreign efforts to stop communism in its tracks. These conditions pushed the revolution into war footing, inspiring Marxists and terrifying capitalists all across the globe.

Images: Alamy, Getty

Series two starts with a bang when IRA agents send the Shelbys a warning by destroying the Garrison Pub

1921-1922

SERIES TWO

38 **IRISH INDEPENDENCE AND THE IRA**
Learn how the IRA – antagonists in series two – gained prominence during the Irish War of Independence that was taking place at the time the series was set

46 **WINSTON CHURCHILL'S EARLY CAREER**
Churchill strikes up an uneasy alliance with Tommy Shelby in the show. Find out more about his fascinating life before leadership

52 **THE RACECOURSE WARS**
Discover how horseracing events across the country fell under the control of powerful, violent gangs

Image: Alamy

SERIES TWO

THE IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Unorthodox fighting methods used by the severely outnumbered IRA forced the British Empire to permanently divide its home country

Words Tom Garner

The British Empire was at its zenith in 1921. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, Britain had acquired huge parts of the Middle East and Africa, but it was at this moment of its territorial peak that the world's largest empire began to disintegrate. Although it was not obvious at the time, the direct cause of imperial decline was within the United Kingdom itself.

Ireland had been an integral part of the UK since 1801 with a British presence that dated back to the 12th century. Nevertheless, despite centuries of unsuccessful rebellions, it was the Irish War of Independence that dealt a severe blow to Britain during a remarkable military campaign.

INTELLIGENCE AND FLYING COLUMNS

On paper the IRA had little hope of defeating British forces. Two army divisions were based in Ireland during the war and troop numbers rose to 50,000 soldiers by July 1921. The army was extensively supported by the RIC and its paramilitary police forces who also numbered in their thousands. By contrast the IRA claimed to have a total strength of 70,000 but in reality only approximately 3,000 volunteers actively fought against the Crown.

Nevertheless the IRA were eventually called to the negotiating table and this achievement was largely due to military pragmatism. Unlike previous Republican uprisings, the IRA were led by realists who achieved results that were disproportionate to their resources.

Intelligence was the most crucial factor of the conflict and Michael Collins organised the IRA war on business lines by prioritising the targeting of policemen, government agents and informers. He knew that the conflict was unequal and so eliminating spies was an effective way of grinding down the British war machine. By denying them proper intelligence, the British could not form a clear strategy against the IRA, which resulted in a frustrating, ambiguous campaign. Events such as Bloody Sunday were also of great propaganda value to Collins who could use British heavy-handedness as a weapon to swing public opinion.

Nevertheless the IRA also had a surprisingly effective fighting wing that was suited to the unique circumstances of the conflict. Because Ireland was one of the home countries of the UK, the British could not use military methods that would have been acceptable in imperial colonies. This made the country an ideal ground for highly organised guerrilla fighting. The IRA managed to develop an army out of scattered rebels and fostered the development of 'Flying Columns'. Numbering 20-100 men per unit, these mobile, armed volunteers characterised the military campaign against the British. Field commanders were encouraged to think for themselves and learn from each encounter with the enemy. This independence bore fruit in several successful ambushes, particularly at Kilmichael in November 1920 when a patrol of RIC Auxiliaries was destroyed.

Although this event was militarily a small affair, the Kilmichael Ambush was a shock to the British. Occurring only a week after Bloody Sunday, the government became increasingly convinced that they were dealing with a rebel army as opposed to a gang of murderers who committed political crimes. The Flying Columns' activities, particularly in counties such as Cork, prevented British authority from fully functioning and they were often aided by the public who provided safe houses and supplies. Even worse for a proud imperial power, the British were suffering small but symbolic military humiliations that often

National Army soldiers of the Irish Free State take over Richmond Barracks from departing British soldiers

Michael Collins and Richard Mulcahy (right) were crucial to the success of the IRA's intelligence and military operations

drove them to vengeful reprisals. This further angered public opinion, both at home and abroad.

STRUGGLING TO FORGET

The truce and Anglo-Irish Treaty that followed in 1921 was perceived as something of a diplomatic success for the British. David Lloyd George believed that he had solved the 'Irish Question' by partitioning the island while keeping the Free State under the Crown and within the Empire. Negotiations were called on his terms and he had threatened "instant and terrible war" if the treaty was not accepted.

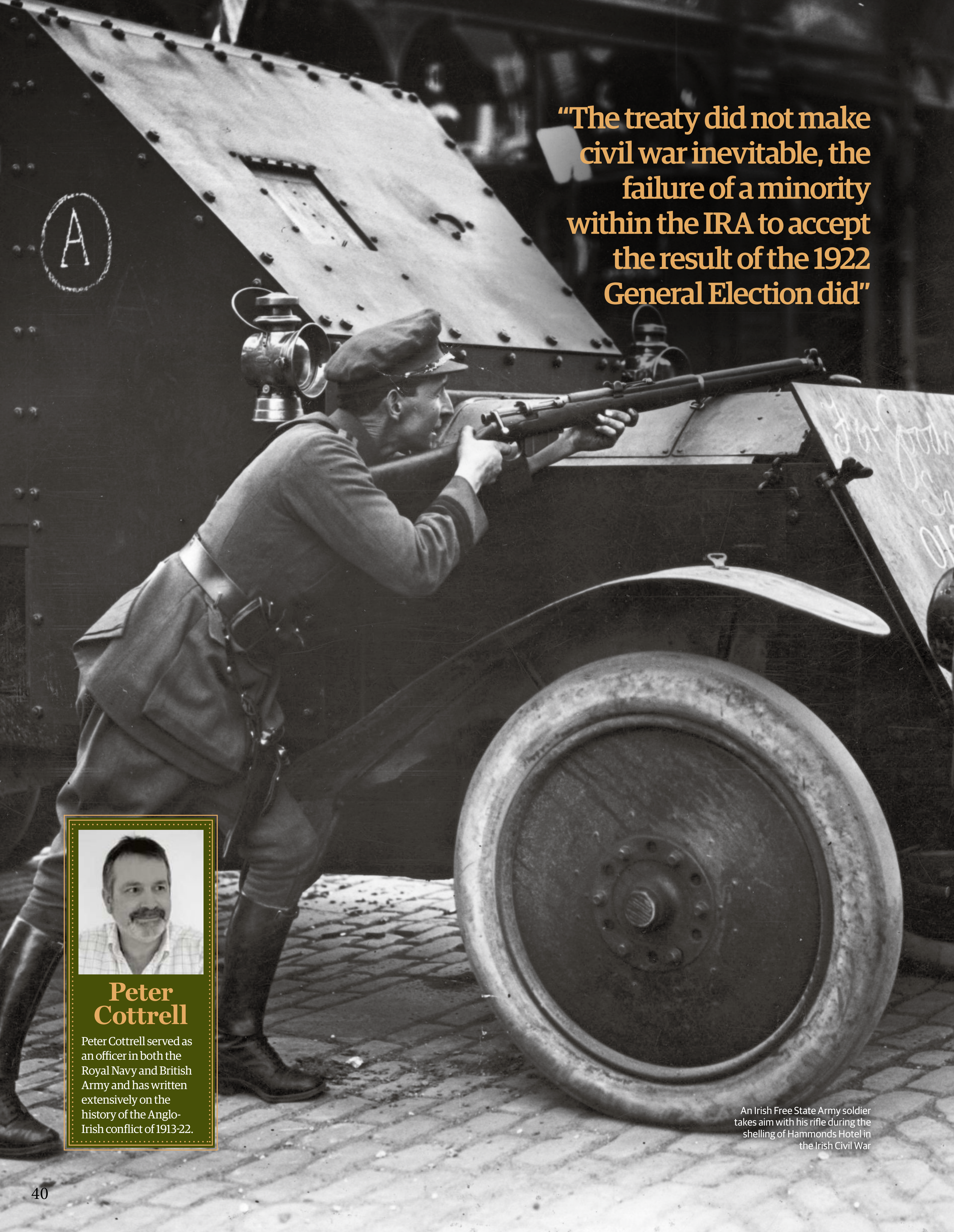
The reality was that the IRA had enabled a limited amount of independence in 26 of Ireland's 32 counties. Covert guerrilla warfare had broken up the UK for the first time and the partitioned border continues to plague Irish politics. The success of the IRA also inspired other insurgencies against the British Empire during the 20th century, which partially led to its irrevocable decline. It is consequently perhaps no surprise that the historian Richard Bennett labelled the Irish War of Independence as one that "the English have struggled to forget and the Irish cannot help but remember".

Fact vs fiction

The Irish War of Independence plays a part in series one and two of *Peaky Blinders*. The gang become caught up in the conflict between the IRA and the British state after stealing weapons from the Birmingham Small Arms Factory. While the factory was a real-life institution and the IRA was gaining prominence post-WWI, that's where the historical accuracy ends. The stolen arms become an overarching plotline of series one, attracting the attention of both the IRA and Winston Churchill. Several major characters are introduced, including Grace Burgess, a Protestant spy, and the series antagonist, Inspector Campbell.

In *Peaky Blinders*, Inspector Campbell (Sam Neill) and Grace Burgess (Annabelle Wallis) are agents of the Crown, tasked with finding the stolen guns before they are sold to the IRA

Images: Getty



“The treaty did not make civil war inevitable, the failure of a minority within the IRA to accept the result of the 1922 General Election did”

Peter Cottrell

Peter Cottrell served as an officer in both the Royal Navy and British Army and has written extensively on the history of the Anglo-Irish conflict of 1913-22.

An Irish Free State Army soldier takes aim with his rifle during the shelling of Hammonds Hotel in the Irish Civil War

A NATION DIVIDED

Revisionist historian Peter Cottrell explains how the conflict, and the subsequent civil war, can be explained as a struggle between two very different visions of an Irish nation

Was the result of the war, and the effective breakup the UK with the Partition, due to British strategic blunders, or an effective Irish military campaign?

It is important to remember that until 1922, Ireland was an integral part of UK, which made British politicians extremely sensitive about any bad publicity resulting from security operations. That doesn't mean that British security operations were ineffective – they were not. By 1922, the IRA's intelligence network was thoroughly compromised and the IRA's Chief of Staff, Richard Mulcahy, told the Dáil that the IRA was incapable of defeating the British Army. That is why Michael Collins signed the Treaty, because the IRA couldn't win.

Did British policy in Ireland, both before and after the war, make the ensuing Civil War inevitable? Which other factors had an impact?

In many respects the entire conflict from 1913-23 was a civil war, as it was fought by Irishmen on both sides with radically different views of how Ireland should be governed. By 1921 the reality was that the IRA was losing the war. Whilst the British were not winning, the treaty represented an acceptable compromise that allowed the violence to end. The treaty did not make civil war inevitable, the failure of a minority within the IRA to accept the result of the 1922 General Election did. Ironically, it also made a united Ireland even less appealing to Irish Unionists and opened divisions in Irish society that persist to this day.

What effect did Irish Nationalism have both on the progression of the war, and how it has been subsequently remembered by history?

Of course, Nationalism was a significant factor in the conflict, but it is important to draw a distinction between Nationalism and Republicanism. Nationalists fought on both sides. Over 200,000 Irishmen fought in the First World War. The majority were Catholic, as were most Irish policemen, as were a significant number of the soldiers who put down the Easter Rising. Few of these men went on to join the IRA, but many did go on to join the British security forces and later the newly raised Irish National Army. These inconvenient truths were airbrushed out of the nationalist narrative because they fundamentally undermine the argument that the conflict was a straight forward struggle for liberation from an oppressive colonial power.

Why is the Anglo-Irish War far less understood or remembered in the UK than in Ireland?

The conflict has been overshadowed by the much greater events of 1914-18 and whilst it may be better remembered in Ireland, it is a rather over-simplified version of events that has been perpetuated. I suspect that this is because neither side covered themselves in glory. The war consisted more of gunmen operating in the shadows than soldiers fighting pitched battles. From a British perspective, the Troubles were a law and order issue as the army was much more focussed on operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, where 200,000 troops were engaged in far bloodier counter-insurgencies.

Many are of the opinion that the war signalled the beginning of the end of the British Empire – do you agree with this?

While the stresses and strains of winning the Great War began the process, the Empire grew after the war. It was the Statute of Westminster (1931) that loosened control over the Dominions' internal affairs as a reward for support during the Great War, rather than the Anglo-Irish War, that began the process of unravelling the Empire. This process accelerated after WWII as a result of increasing pressure from the USA. During this period, Eire remained a Dominion within the Empire until it became a Republic in 1949 by the mutual consent of both the Irish and British governments.

A smiling National Army soldier with a captured member of the IRA in July 1922

Images: Getty, Alamy

SERIES TWO

TIMELINE OF THE... IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

Republican politicians and guerrilla fighters fought a bitter campaign against the British that resulted in the partition of Ireland

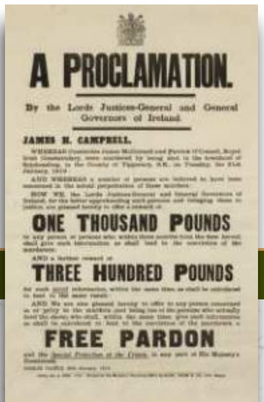
FIRST DÁIL 01

The first meeting of the revolutionary parliament of the Irish Republic occurs at Mansion House, Dublin. Known as 'Dáil Éireann', the parliament's members belong to Sinn Féin and declare Irish independence from Britain. The first military engagement of the resulting conflict occurs on the same day at the Soloheadbeg Ambush.

21 January 1919

SOLOHEADBEG AMBUSH 02

The first engagement of the war sees the Irish Volunteers attacking RIC officers. The policemen are escorting a consignment of gelignite, which is seized by their attackers along with their weapons. Two members of the RIC are killed during the ambush.



A PROCLAMATION.

By the Lords Justices-General and General Governors of Ireland.

JAMES H. CAMPBELL.

ONE THOUSAND POUNDS

THREE HUNDRED POUNDS

FREE PARDON

A government proclamation offering a reward of £1,000 for information regarding those involved in the Soloheadbeg Ambush

1919-22

TARGETING THE RIC

The newly formed Irish Republican Army (IRA) immediately focuses on killing officers of the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), particularly in the provinces. Over 500 are killed, which enables the IRA to increase their political authority in outlying areas of Ireland.

RIC officers pictured in Waterford. The vast majority of the 9,700 men who police for the British are Irishmen

13 May 1919

RESCUE AT KNOCKLONG 03

A captured IRA member, Seán Hogan, is rescued from a train by his comrades while being guarded by four armed RIC officers. Hogan is due to be executed but his rescue boosts morale for the Irish republican cause. Two policemen are killed and several IRA volunteers wounded.

Seán Hogan becomes the IRA commander of the 3rd Tipperary Brigade flying column after his rescue

Members of the First Dáil, including Michael Collins (front row, second from left) and Éamon de Valera (front row, centre) are photographed, 10 April 1919

SACK OF BALBRIGGAN 04

Around 100-150 Black and Tans rampage through Balbriggan in response to the killing of an RIC district inspector. The town is looted, two men are killed and many buildings are burnt down including a factory, four pubs and 49 houses.

Refugees leave the ruined Balbriggan. The former British Prime Minister H. H. Asquith condemns the violence and compares the sacking to the suffering of Belgium during WWI

March 1920

21 September 1920

28 November 1920

Black and Tans hold a suspected Sinn Féin member at gunpoint and search him for weapons

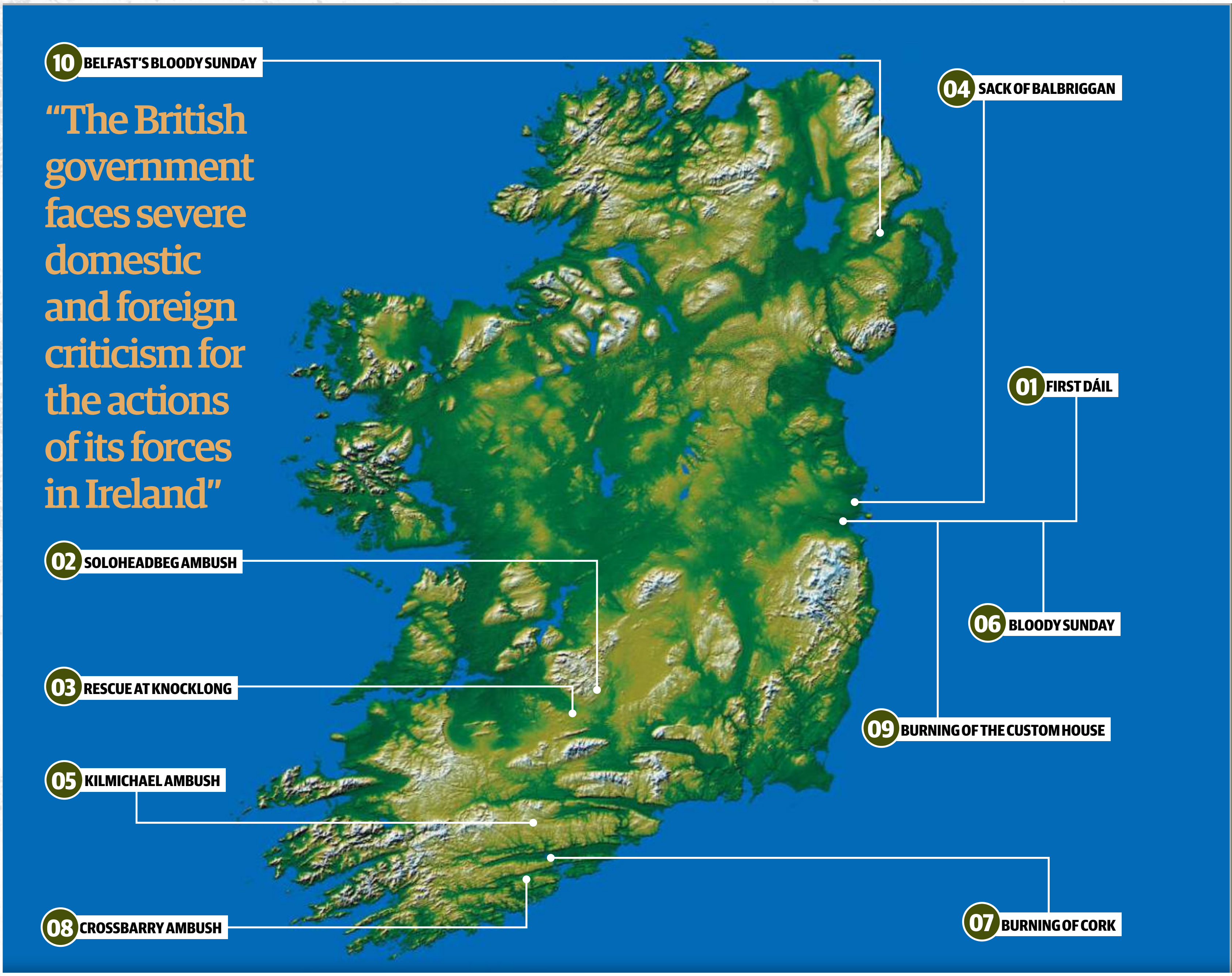
ENTER THE BLACK AND TANS

The British deploy the regular army to Ireland in greater numbers and establish two paramilitary police units to aid the beleaguered RIC. Collectively known as the 'Black and Tans', thousands of these temporary constables are ex-British servicemen who gain an infamously violent reputation.

A modern image of the IRA ambush firing positions near Kilmichael. The commemorative memorial is located in the background on the road

KILMICHAEL AMBUSH 05

Thirty six IRA volunteers of the 3rd (West) Cork Brigade destroy an entire patrol of 17 members of the RIC Auxiliary Division. There is only one wounded RIC survivor and the ambush shocks the British forces who wreak revenge. The area around Kilmichael is torched and three IRA volunteers are arrested, beaten and killed.


10 BELFAST'S BLOODY SUNDAY
04 SACK OF BALBRIGGAN
01 FIRST DÁIL
02 SOLOHEADBEG AMBUSH
06 BLOODY SUNDAY
03 RESCUE AT KNOCKLONG
09 BURNING OF THE CUSTOM HOUSE
05 KILMICHAEL AMBUSH
08 CROSSBARRY AMBUSH
07 BURNING OF CORK

> "The British government faces severe domestic and foreign criticism for the actions of its forces in Ireland"

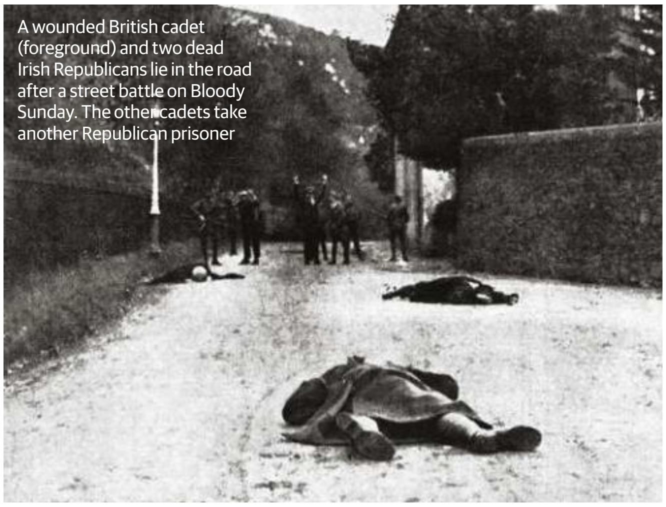
21 November 1920

11-12 December 1920

19 March 1921

BLOODY SUNDAY 06

Dublin suffers a day of violence when 32 people are killed across the city, including British soldiers and policemen, Irish civilians and Republican prisoners. Many more are wounded but the violence is considered a victory for the IRA because of the damage done to British intelligence operations.



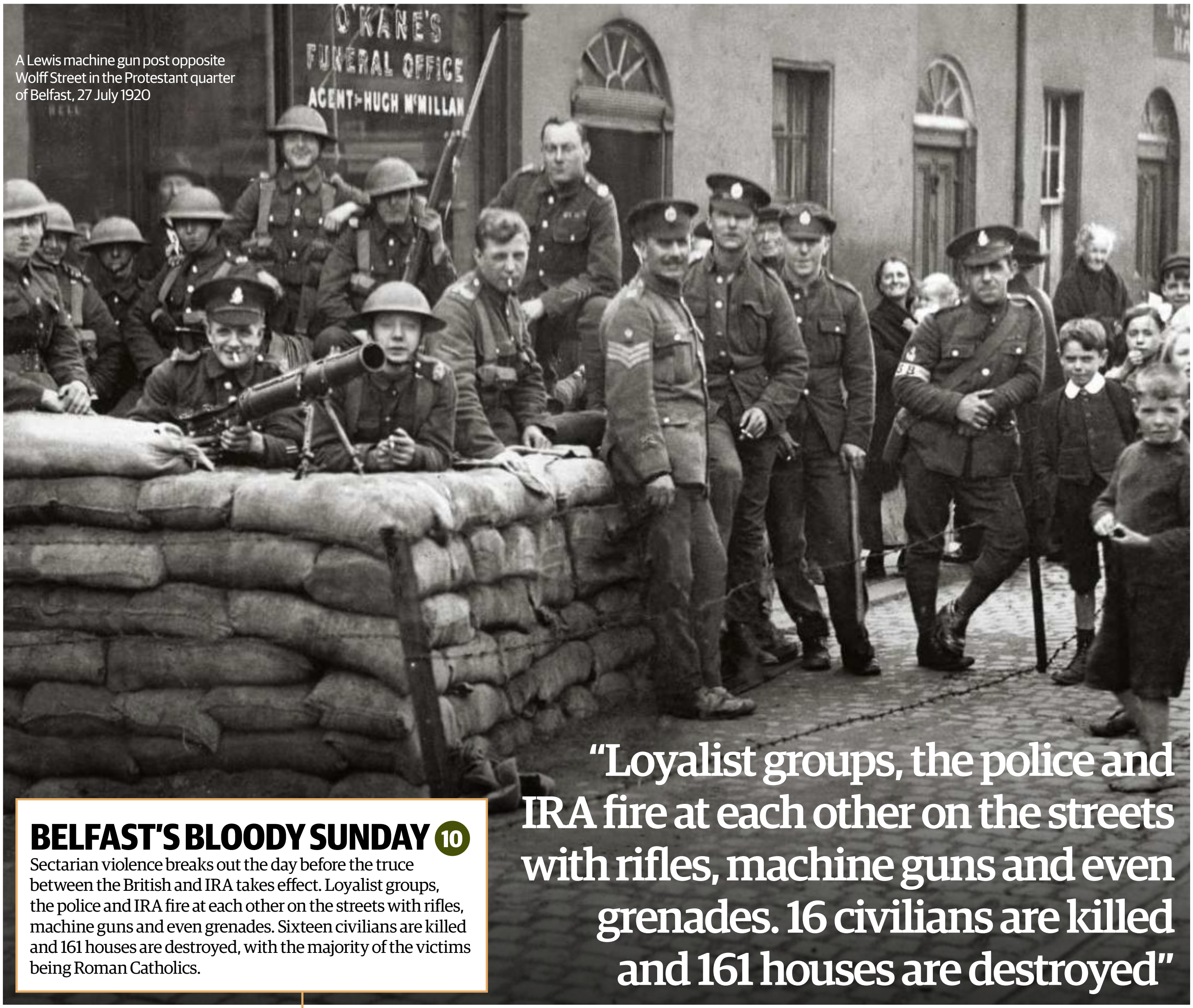
A wounded British cadet (foreground) and two dead Irish Republicans lie in the road after a street battle on Bloody Sunday. The other cadets take another Republican prisoner

BURNING OF CORK 07

Following an IRA ambush at Dillon's Cross, British soldiers, Auxiliaries and Black and Tans loot and burn buildings in Cork city centre. Firefighters are intimidated and the damage is significant. Over 40 business premises, 300 residential properties, the Carnegie Library and the city hall are destroyed. 2,000 civilians are left jobless and many more become homeless.

CROSSBARRY AMBUSH 08

One of the largest engagements of the war occurs when 104 IRA volunteers fight 1,200 British troops and Auxiliaries who attempt to encircle them. The IRA not only successfully escapes in an hour-long engagement but also inflict ten fatalities on the British for the loss of only three men.



A Lewis machine gun post opposite Wolff Street in the Protestant quarter of Belfast, 27 July 1920

10 July 1921

BELFAST'S BLOODY SUNDAY ⑩

Sectarian violence breaks out the day before the truce between the British and IRA takes effect. Loyalist groups, the police and IRA fire at each other on the streets with rifles, machine guns and even grenades. Sixteen civilians are killed and 161 houses are destroyed, with the majority of the victims being Roman Catholics.

> "Loyalist groups, the police and IRA fire at each other on the streets with rifles, machine guns and even grenades. 16 civilians are killed and 161 houses are destroyed"

25 May 1921

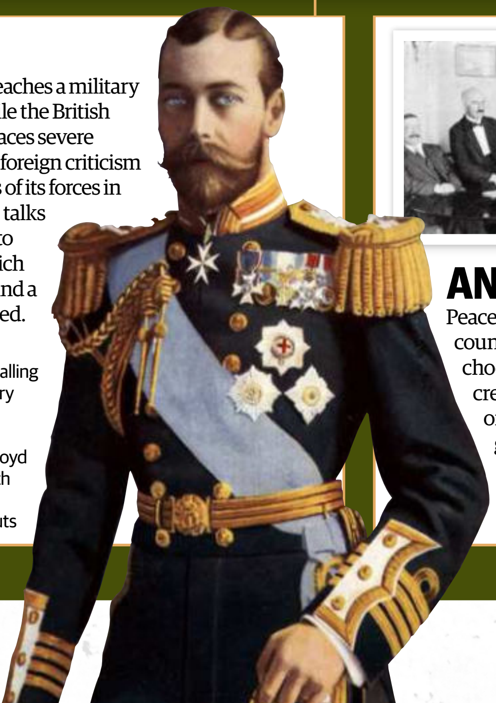
BURNING OF THE CUSTOM HOUSE ⑨

Approximately 120 IRA volunteers occupy a key building of the British administration in Ireland. Although the occupation is a significant propaganda coup, the action turns into a military disaster when British forces arrive and the Custom House is destroyed by fire. Around 70-80 IRA members are captured and five are killed while the British suffer only four wounded. The capture of so many volunteers is a significant blow to the republicans.

July-December 1921

TRUCE

The conflict reaches a military stalemate while the British government faces severe domestic and foreign criticism for the actions of its forces in Ireland. Peace talks are proposed to Sinn Féin, which are accepted and a truce is declared.



King George V is instrumental in calling for a reconciliatory truce along with British Prime Minister David Lloyd George and South African Prime Minister Jan Smuts

6 December 1921

Irish delegates pictured with the treaty including Michael Collins (centre), Arthur Griffith (far left) and Erskine Childers (centre, standing), the author of The Riddle Of The Sands

ANGLO-IRISH TREATY

Peace talks in London result in an important treaty. The country is partitioned between Northern Ireland, which chooses to remain in the United Kingdom, and the newly created Irish Free State. The Free State comprises of 26 of the 32 counties of Ireland and is established as a self-governing dominion within the British Empire. George V remains the head of state and this continued and contentious connection with Britain results in the even bloodier Irish Civil War.

Images: Alamy, Getty

SERIES TWO

WINSTON CHURCHILL'S EARLY CAREER

Before leading Britain through the Second World War as Prime Minister, Churchill was a soldier, journalist and a seasoned member of parliament

Words Timothy Williamson

Winston Churchill was one of the most iconic and important statesmen of the 20th century. He is most famous for leading Britain through the Second World War, after he became prime minister in 1940. His speeches in parliament and elsewhere during the war became symbolic of the resistance against Nazi Germany and its allies.

A resolute supporter of the British Empire, Churchill worked to protect his nation's status as a world power, alongside the USA and Soviet Union. He was highly influential in the post-war settlement after the defeat of the Axis powers, and was also instrumental in the creation of what would become the United Nations, in 1945.

Prior to these unparalleled accomplishments, Churchill had also been a soldier, writer and journalist, only entering politics at the turn of the 20th century, emulating his father's career as a member of the Conservative Party. After navigating a path through the often cutthroat world of politics, he served in several top government positions, and during the First World War was the First Lord of the Admiralty. During these pre-PM years, Churchill played a key part in several major events in British history, from women's suffrage protests to the Irish War of Independence.

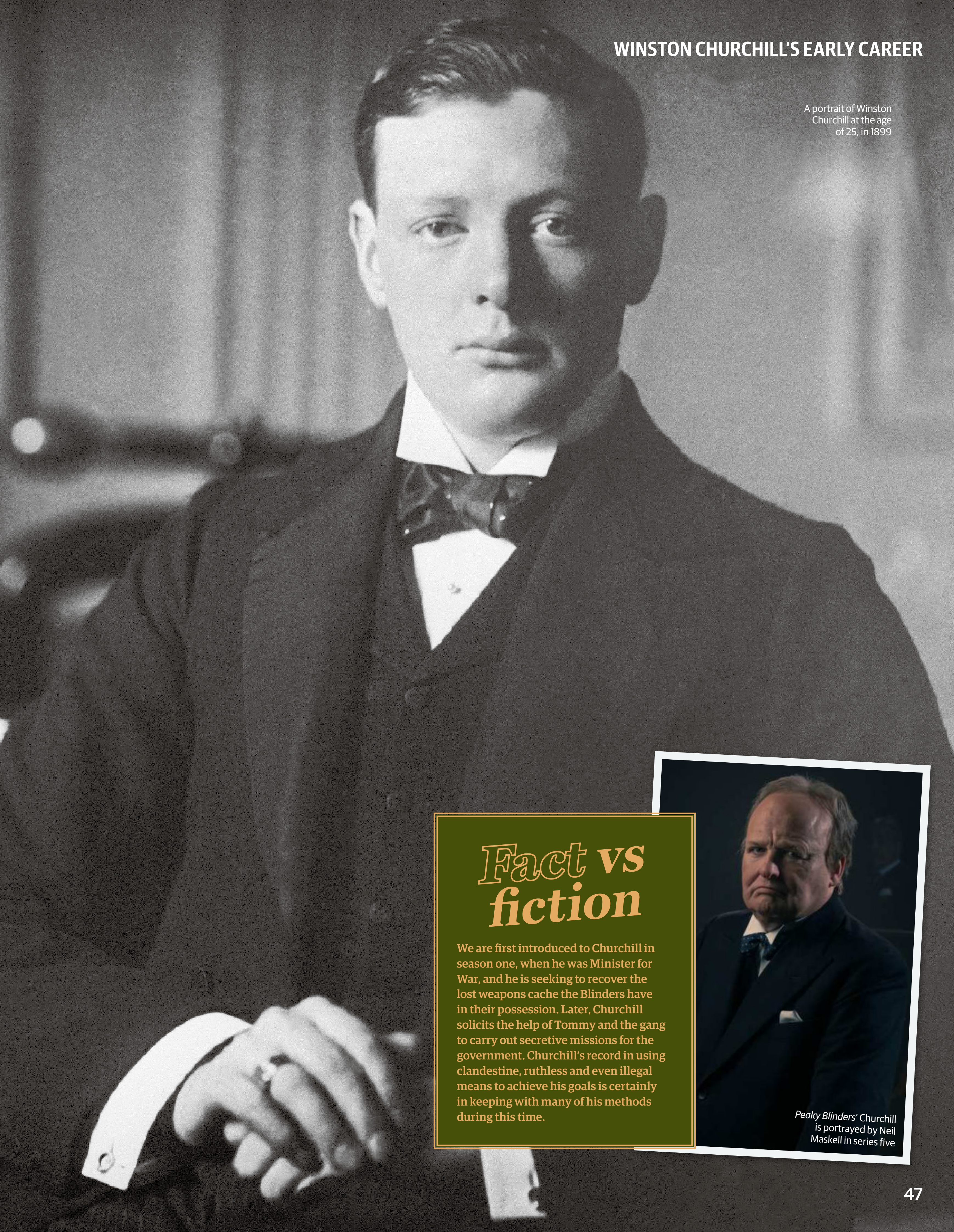
CHILDHOOD AND EDUCATION

Churchill was born at Blenheim Palace, his family's grand home in Oxfordshire, on 30 November 1874. The Churchills were aristocratic, embedded in Britain's upper class, and well connected politically. Winston's grandfather, John Winston Spencer-Churchill, was the 7th Duke of Marlborough and served as the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland. In his autobiography, Churchill fondly recalled his family's time in Ireland, which he claimed were some of his earliest memories. The family moved back to England shortly after the birth of their second child and Winston's younger brother, Jack.

At boarding school, the young Churchill was reportedly rebellious, and a relatively low academic achiever, being graded the lowest in several of his classes. He often got into fights and squabbles with classmates and even teachers. With no firm academic prospects, his father ordered the young boy to apply to Sandhurst, Britain's prestigious military academy. He passed the entry exam on his third attempt - much to his father's anger - and joined the academy as an infantry cadet in 1893.

A more military-focused education suited Churchill better, and he engaged in studying tactics as well as practising horse riding, map reading, fencing and marksmanship. Under two years later he completed his training and was commissioned as an officer in the 4th Queen's Own Hussars in 1895. Now a soldier, the young Churchill spent a long time garrisoned in India with his regiment.

However, far from taking to the officer's lifestyle, he soon became bored of life in the garrison, and set on following his father's footsteps into politics. Devoid of the university education common with, and even expected from, a member of parliament, he embarked on a monumental programme of self-taught study. Thousands of miles from England, Churchill read pages of parliamentary debates, and pored over tomes by philosophers, economists and politicians.



A portrait of Winston Churchill at the age of 25, in 1899

Fact vs fiction

We are first introduced to Churchill in season one, when he was Minister for War, and he is seeking to recover the lost weapons cache the Blinders have in their possession. Later, Churchill solicits the help of Tommy and the gang to carry out secretive missions for the government. Churchill's record in using clandestine, ruthless and even illegal means to achieve his goals is certainly in keeping with many of his methods during this time.

Peaky Blinders' Churchill is portrayed by Neil Maskell in series five

Churchill pictured in 1915, when he was First Lord of the Admiralty, walking with fellow Liberal politician Lloyd George

MANOEUVRE INTO POLITICS

By 1899 Churchill was ready to step onto the political battlefield, and resigned his commission in the army. His timing could not have been worse, as that autumn a second war with the Boers in southern Africa presented too much temptation for another chance at a spot of glory. Not long after he arrived in the warzone, Churchill was caught in a Boer ambush while travelling on an armoured train with British troops.

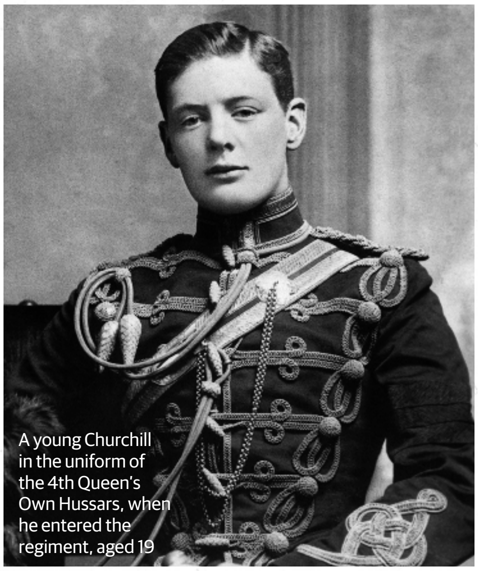
Though he reportedly took command of the situation, and attempted to rally a defence of the stricken train, in the end he and several soldiers were captured. Churchill and his fellow prisoners of war were held in Pretoria, but an escape plan was soon hatched. On the night of 12 December, Churchill scaled the prison fence unseen and disappeared into the darkness. His successful 300-mile trek through enemy territory made him a hero when he returned to Britain. Largely due to the swell of fame and popularity for outwitting his captors, Churchill won the seat for Oldham in the 1900 General Election.

His early years as a sitting member of parliament were not without event, but he did not captivate crowds with the kinds of rousing speeches for which he would later become iconic. For a long time he occupied the position of a fringe backbencher, often heckling or arguing against his own party on issues ranging from peace deals with the Boers in Africa, to reform of the armed forces. In 1904 he even went so far as to switch political parties, joining the opposing Liberal Party, as part of a co-ordinated attack on prime minister Arthur Balfour's government.

It was while a member of the Liberal Party that Churchill got his first taste of political power. When the Liberals won the 1906 General Election, Churchill was invited to become under-secretary at the Colonial Office, a now defunct department that dealt with Britain's then still global empire. Two years later he was appointed as President of the Board of Trade, in H. H. Asquith's government. As his career progressed, resentment for his perceived betrayal grew among his former friends in the Conservative Party.

RISE TO HOME SECRETARY

After the 1910 General Election, Churchill was made Home Secretary – one of the most important positions in the government, responsible for matters closer to home. This role attracted more attention from women's suffrage groups, with which he had already clashed. Though he had expressed some



A young Churchill in the uniform of the 4th Queen's Own Hussars, when he entered the regiment, aged 19

Pictured alongside his fellow prisoners of war, Churchill can be seen here on the right after being captured by Boer troops in 1899

support for women's votes, he had also publicly asserted he would not be 'henpecked' into making a firm decision on the issue.

On 18 November, 1910, around 300 protestors from the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) marched on parliament, and were violently attacked by police. Several women were injured and others even alleged being sexually assaulted during the aggressive breakup of the protestors. As Home Secretary, Churchill was criticised for the way the protest was handled by the police, and the event became known as 'Black Friday'. Though he ordered all 119 women that had been arrested on the day to be released, he also refused to investigate the conduct of the police in the clashes.

As Home Secretary, Churchill also was responsible for the police response to large industry strikes. November 1910 saw another test for him, when a large miners' strike began in the Rhondda Valley, South Wales. After nights of rioting and looting in Tonypandy town centre, the local authorities called for the Home Office to help prevent further damage to property. Churchill responded by sending more police support, but also troops. What transpired again threw the Liberal Home Secretary into controversy, as critics accused him of betraying the working-class miners by deploying troops onto the streets, while others claimed the presence of the soldiers prevented further violence.

January 1911 saw yet another challenge for Churchill – this time closer to home. On 2-3 January a small gang of Latvian anarchist jewellery thieves barricaded themselves in a house in Sidney Street, East London, and fired on police. Though accounts differ on his involvement in handling events on the ground, Churchill was photographed at the scene, looking on as the police dealt with the besieged gang. When the house the anarchists were held up in caught fire, reports claim Churchill ordered it to be left to burn down.

At home with the Churchills

Lady Churchill photographed with her sons Jack (left) and Winston

Churchill's father, Lord Randolph Churchill, was the member of parliament for Woodstock and at one time had a promising political career. He served as the Secretary of State for India, Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Leader of the House of Commons. In 1886, he resigned from his position after a number of ill-judged political manoeuvres within the Conservative Party saw him ostracised. A heavy drinker and smoker, Randolph also reportedly had multiple love affairs, leaving little time to devote to his children. He died aged only 45, of multiple conditions including complications from syphilis, according to many historians. His premature death had a profound effect on his family, including his eldest son Winston. Jeanette (or Jennie) Jerome, Churchill's mother, was a dazzling American socialite from New York City. When not carrying on with her own extra-marital rendezvous, she was supportive of her husband's political career, and easily fell in with London's rich and powerful as she had done across the Atlantic. Like her husband, her own interests left little time for the young Winston, who was instead raised by a diligent and affectionate nanny, Elizabeth Everest. Nicknamed "Woom", Everest raised Winston and his younger brother, until the pair were packed off to boarding school, as was the norm at the time for the children of very wealthy or otherwise occupied parents.

> "Churchill's escape and successful 300-mile trek through enemy territory made him a hero when he returned to Britain"

IRELAND AND WWI

1912 saw the issue of Irish Home Rule escalate, and Churchill was once again an influential figure in the debates. At the time Ireland was still politically joined to Great Britain and was governed by the Westminster Parliament. The Home Rule movement argued for the creation of an independent Irish parliament to govern the country, breaking Ireland away from governance from the British Parliament. With his family's history with Ireland well known by allies and opponents alike, Churchill found himself in opposition to the position his late father had taken, siding with his party's policy of favouring Home Rule. This also placed him in opposition to Ulster Unionist groups, some of whom threatened violence if Home Rule were to be made law. Such was the danger posed by Unionist groups, that when Churchill travelled to give a speech at Ulster Hall, Belfast, the venue had to be hastily changed for fear of his safety.

No matter how ominous this threat of conflict at home seemed, by the mid-1910s a greater crisis was building in Europe. Now the First Lord of the Admiralty, Churchill was the political head of unarguably the British Empire's greatest military asset: the Royal Navy. He instigated a series of reforms, replacing old sea lords with younger more modern-minded replacements, and championing the construction of larger, more powerful battleships for the fleet.

At the outbreak of the First World War Churchill was among those arguing for Britain to enter the fray, and he took an active role in organising Britain's naval response. He even mobilised the navy on a combat footing before Britain officially declared war. His military background and love of strategy compelled him to be involved at even very minute levels of command, including the defence of Antwerp from the advancing German army in 1914.

However, his hands-on approach to his role as First Lord of the Admiralty proved to be his undoing. Churchill's enthusiastic role in planning and promoting the disastrous Gallipoli Campaign could not be overlooked. The attack on Gallipoli was an attempt to seize the Dardanelles strait, the narrow channel of water linking Istanbul, Turkey's capital, to the Mediterranean. British, Australian and New Zealand troops did manage to land and establish a frontline against the Turks, but it soon became a hugely attritional battle, with large casualties due to the conditions as much as the enemy. By the end of the year, it was clear the campaign had failed, and Churchill was forced to resign his post in November, 1915.

Still eager as ever to be involved in the fighting, and in a bid to restore his reputation, Churchill requested to be placed in active service. He was briefly given command of the 6th battalion of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, and joined them on the frontline in 1916. However, he was soon tempted back to Westminster when the opportunity came to restore his political career. He ended the war as Minister for Munitions – not quite restored to the prestigious height from which he had fallen, but equally out of political exile.

IRISH WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

After the end of the First World War, Churchill soon found new military projects to champion. Already a fierce opponent of communism, he argued for greater support of the White Russian cause in their fight against the Bolshevik forces, during the Russian Civil War. This appeal to the dangers of Bolshevism fell mostly on deaf ears however, as his Liberal colleagues were unwilling to leap from one major conflict into another.

Another war was nonetheless on the horizon in Ireland. Neglected during the First World War, the unresolved crisis between Irish nationalists and Unionists had grown more dangerous and by 1918 was on the brink of a civil war. The 1916 Easter Uprising had already shown that Irish republican forces were armed and more than capable of waging war against the British. The Irish War of Independence began in 1919, and now as joint Minister for War and Air, Churchill was tasked with defeating the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

To counter the guerrilla tactics and covert assassinations carried out by the IRA, Churchill ordered the creation of several paramilitary forces. Among these were the Black and Tans,

During the Siege of Sidney Street, London, in 1911, Churchill was photographed at the scene among police officers

Accompanied by his wife Clementine, Churchill walks to parliament to present his budget, while Chancellor of the Exchequer

"Churchill's enthusiastic role in planning and promoting the disastrous Gallipoli Campaign could not be overlooked"

a volunteer militia sent in 1920 to support the Royal Irish Constabulary. Their brutally violent methods saw ever more support for Irish Republicanism and remain a moral stain in British history. During the eventual peace talks in 1921, Churchill was appointed as the government's negotiator, opposite Michael Collins, who led the IRA's military campaign.

Though his part in the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which established the Irish Free State, was welcomed by many, Churchill was yet on the brink of another major setback in his political career. In 1922 he lost his parliamentary seat after surgery for appendicitis left him unable to take to the campaign trail. He was left, as he put it "without an office, without a seat, without a party and without an appendix."

RETURN TO THE CONSERVATIVES

It was not until 1924 that Churchill returned to Westminster, invited to stand for the Epping seat for the Conservative Party, for whom he won a majority. He would hold this seat until the end of his career. Prime minister Stanley Baldwin appointed Churchill Chancellor of the Exchequer, and he set about creating a budget that cut public spending. Lumbered with immense financial debts built up during the First World War, Churchill even ordered spending cuts to the Admiralty.

When a general strike was announced in 1926, over the proposal to reduce miners' wages, Churchill again was accused of a heavy-handed approach in his response. With no workers to transport food and goods from London's docks, Churchill brought in soldiers to drive the trucks, delivering supplies to London's boroughs. The move was criticised by some as another show of force to intimidate the unions. Though the strike broke after only nine days, it had involved millions of people, and all but brought the country to a halt. Its repercussions were not forgotten, the Conservatives lost support in the 1929 General Election.

It would not be until 1939, when another great crisis emerged in the form of the Second World War, that Churchill would again achieve high office. Reclaiming his role as First Lord of the Admiralty, he formed part of the War Cabinet created to lead Britain's campaign against Nazi Germany. Churchill's ultimate defining moment was almost at hand. True to his life's ambitions, it was both a monumental military and political challenge, over which he was certain he was destined to triumph.

Churchill (centre) pictured in France during WWI, wearing a French army helmet

Churchill's 'Wilderness Years'

After the 1929 General Election, Churchill found himself out of government, and life in the shadows of political power did not suit his driving desire for action and leadership. This led to some referring to this period of his career as his 'Wilderness Years'. Though he remained a sitting MP and kept himself fully apprised of the political developments of the day, he also turned to his own literary projects to occupy his time.

Already the author of several works, for example chronicling the First World War in *The World Crisis*, as well as a biography of his father Randolph Churchill, he now took to writing a history of the First Duke of Marlborough. He also remained a fierce debater in parliament, and vigorously voiced his opposition to the anti-colonial Quit India Movement, and in particular criticised Indian civil rights leader Mahatma Gandhi.

Towards the middle the 1930s, as the rise of Hitler and Nazi Germany became increasingly alarming, he advocated for maintaining a strong military, in preparation for any possible conflict. Using contacts in the civil service, he was able to gather information on Germany's military rearmament. He argued strongly for Britain to increase its own military, at a time when the horrific memory of the First World War meant that most in government and the country wished to avoid more bloodshed.

Perhaps one of the most important moments in this period was Churchill's role in Britain's air defence committee, known as the Tizard Committee, which aimed to develop new technologies to help the RAF defend Britain against air attack. This would prove invaluable in the conflict to come.

While visiting New York City on a speaking tour in 1931, Churchill was knocked down by a car, leaving him hospitalised for some time

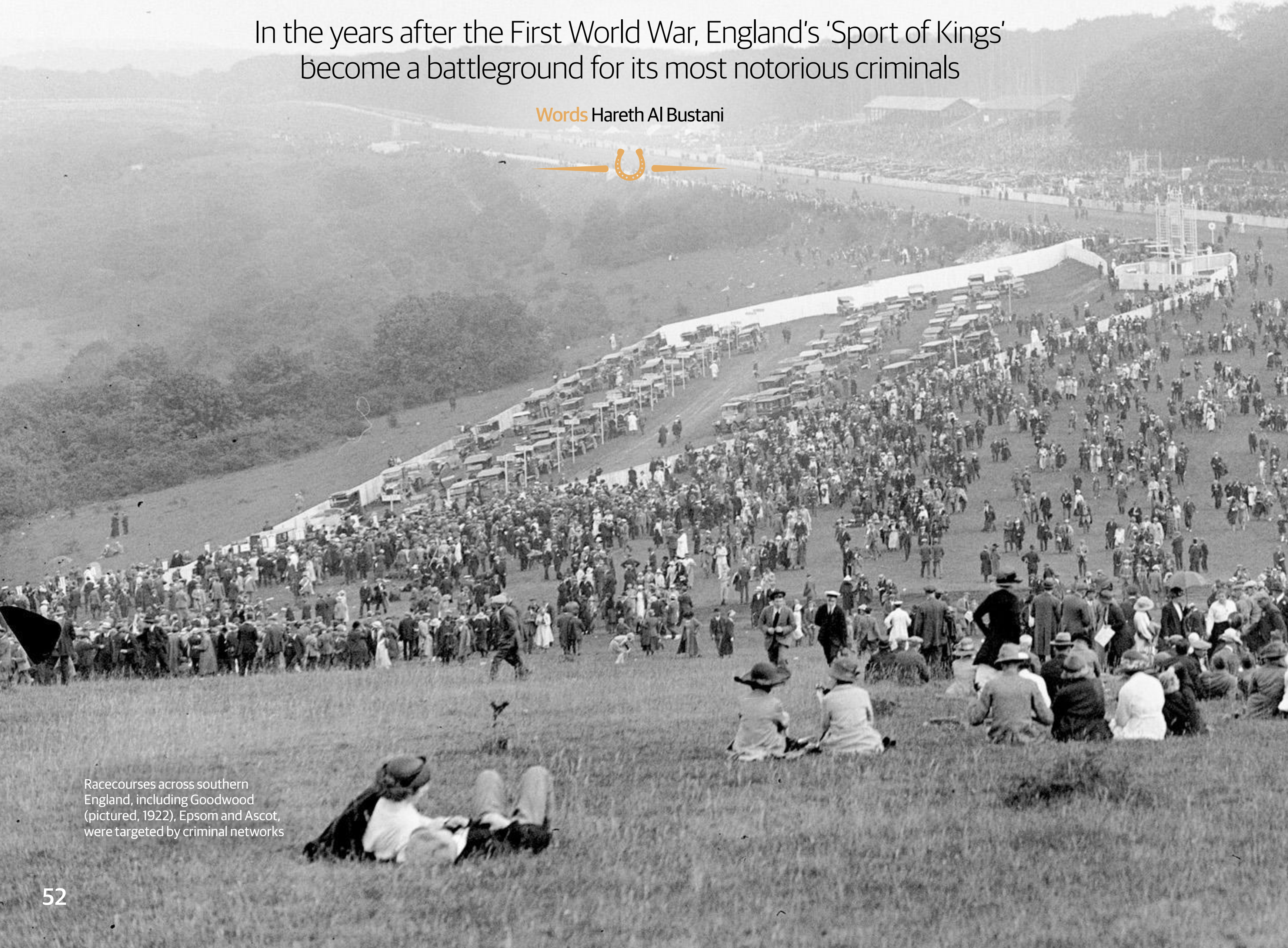
Images: Alamy, Getty

SERIES TWO

THE RACECOURSE WARS

In the years after the First World War, England's 'Sport of Kings' become a battleground for its most notorious criminals

Words Hareth Al Bustani



Racecourses across southern England, including Goodwood (pictured, 1922), Epsom and Ascot, were targeted by criminal networks

As the First World War drew to a close, even with the Spanish Flu raging across the continent, horse racing soared to new heights, drawing throngs of crowds to tracks all across England; from Aintree and Epsom to Ascot to Lewes. Of all the country's favourite past times, none could quite match the spectacle and excitement of the race track. Events like the Epsom Derby could draw up to half a million revellers, and horse racing helped sell 500,000 copies of the evening papers, and 100,000 copies of *Sporting Life* every day.

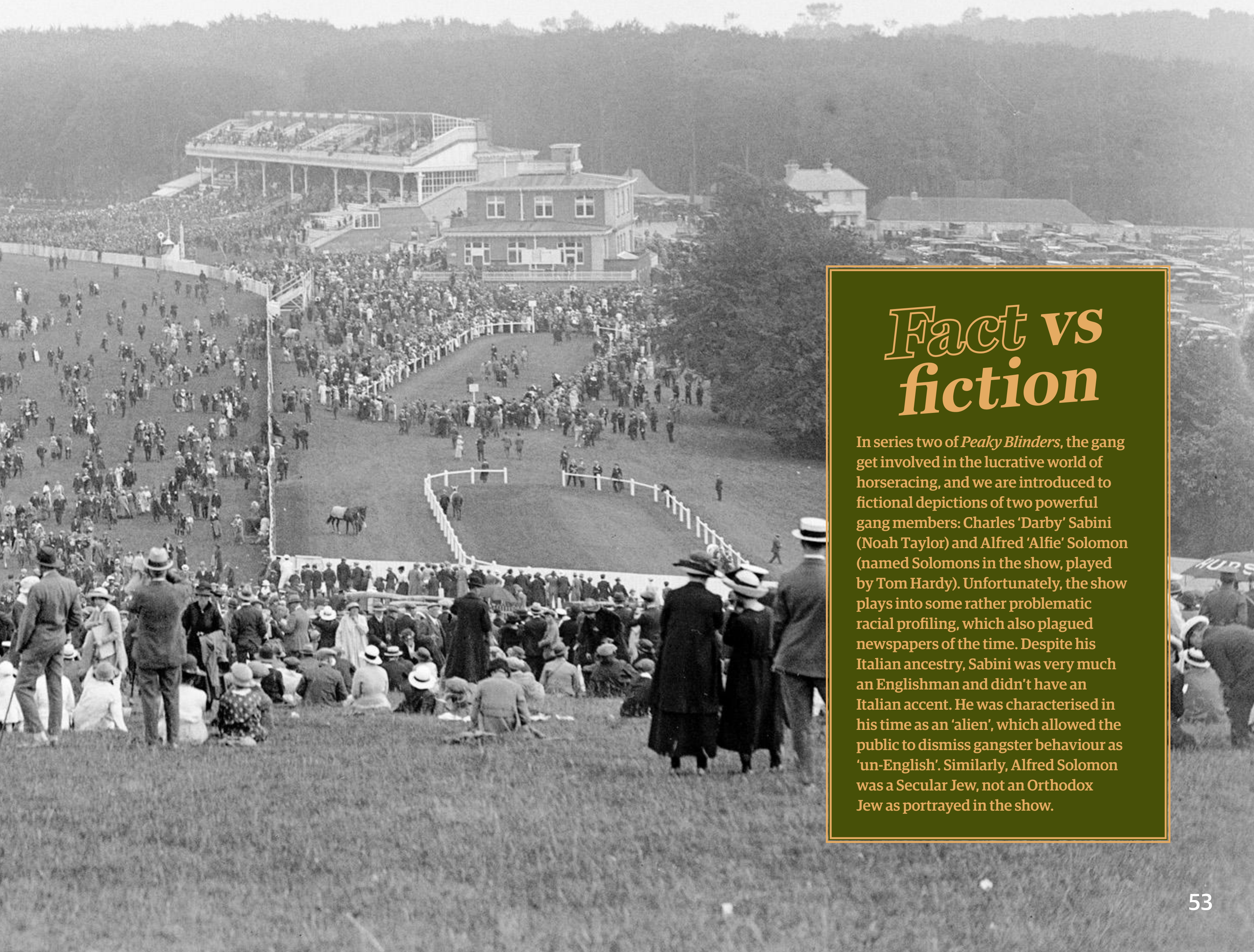
It was also a gambler's dream, with 4 million people betting on the races every week. Although 'working class', or off-course street cash betting was banned; attempts to enforce this proved futile. Meanwhile, credit betting, and on-course cash betting remained legal. In 1920, Britons spent £63 million on legal gambling – mostly on the races – which would almost quadruple in the next two decades – rising to five percent of total consumer expenditure.

The races spawned whole industries, with tipsters loitering around tracks, selling advantageous information, based on their alleged experience as stable boys or retired jockeys. Conmen, meanwhile, pulled all manner of tricks; from rushing into crowds and picking pockets, to selling fake tickets or charging people to use their 'toilets' – which were little more than tents with shallow holes dug in the ground.

Of course, these conmen paled in comparison to the organised criminals who swarmed upon the racetracks. Gangsters took over the best pitches by force, intimidating bookies, and forcing them to fork up protection money. They even had the gall to rent them stools, and sell them printed race cards and chalk for their blackboards; items they already owned. Through these tactics, gangsters could earn £4,000 a day at Brighton, and up to £15,000 on Derby Day. If a bookie defaulted on payment, the gangsters would spark up a brawl, driving off customers. And if they had the gall to refuse to pay protection, the thug would yell "A dirty welsher!" or "swindler", and call over their companions to brutalise the hapless victim, trash their stands and steal their money.

In most cases, violence wasn't required. The gangsters made a point of hanging hammers from their waistbands, with their jackets wide open; letting all know what lay in store for those who opposed them. Gangsters were also usually armed with iron rods, hatchets, knives and razors; which they weren't afraid to use. In the 1920s, there were 14,625 registered bookmakers; paying up to 50 percent of their winnings to gangs. By 1925, they had such a tight grip on the industry that bookies virtually couldn't operate without paying £25 a day to their 'protectors' – who were always happy to simply confiscate winning tickets from lucky punters.

With so much money up for grabs, it wasn't long before these gangs came into conflict with one another as they fought to retain control over bookies, patches, territories and racecourses themselves. While Britain had long experienced an underbelly of organised crime, incidents of violence began to spill out all across society; from the racetracks to the streets themselves, all the way into the headlines. Having returned from the front lines, Britain's post-WWI thugs were a different breed; war-hardened and trained in combat. Dubbed the 'racecourse wars', the war for South-East England's racing tracks reached



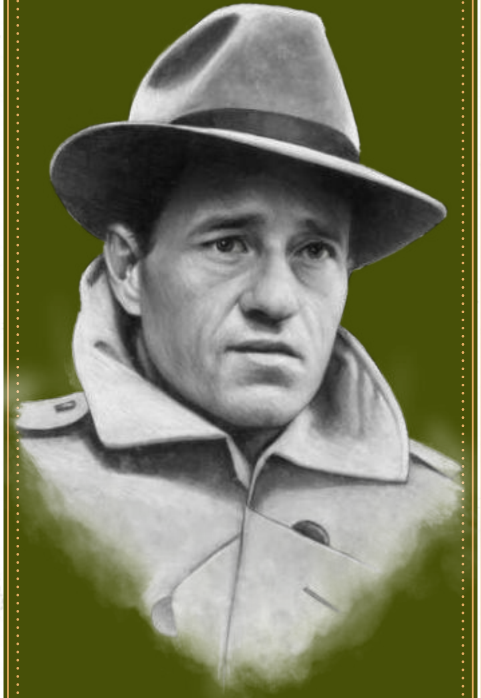
Fact vs fiction

In series two of *Peaky Blinders*, the gang get involved in the lucrative world of horseracing, and we are introduced to fictional depictions of two powerful gang members: Charles 'Darby' Sabini (Noah Taylor) and Alfred 'Alfie' Solomon (named Solomons in the show, played by Tom Hardy). Unfortunately, the show plays into some rather problematic racial profiling, which also plagued newspapers of the time. Despite his Italian ancestry, Sabini was very much an Englishman and didn't have an Italian accent. He was characterised in his time as an 'alien', which allowed the public to dismiss gangster behaviour as 'un-English'. Similarly, Alfred Solomon was a Secular Jew, not an Orthodox Jew as portrayed in the show.

The real Sabini-Solomon connection

Darby Sabini was born to an Italian father and an English mother in Clerkenwell Green, a part of North London dubbed 'Little Italy'. Having left school at 13, he became a mildly successful boxer, before establishing a gang of pickpockets, and eventually moving into the racecourse racket, extorting money from bookmakers. Dressed scruffily with a mouthful of gold teeth, he developed a Robin Hood reputation, as a protector of immigrants and women alike. After successfully waging war against numerous rivals, including the Birmingham Boys, he and his brothers were interned as 'aliens' in WWII, even as his own son died fighting in the RAF. His empire was later taken over by the White family, and he died relatively poor in 1950.

One of Sabini's main allies was Alfred Solomon, a war veteran and leader of a Jewish gang based out of Camden Town. Violently unpredictable, Solomon operated an illegal distillery disguised as a bakery. In 1930, fearing for his life, he wrote to the police, offering to inform on several of his rivals, who he alleged were under the protection of a police inspector.



As betting and horse racing took England by storm, opportunist gangsters like Darby Sabini built an entire criminal industry on extortion and intimidation

H. GUMBLE
SAUNDERS
SAM ISAACS
CHARLIE WHITE
WEYMAN
BEN
ALF
TED MARSHALL
LANGLEY AND BIRCH
H READ NORWICH
TOM HANSON SHEFFIELD

With up to 500,000 people attending England's largest races, gangsters could earn up to £15,000 in a single day through protection rackets

bloody heights between 1922 and 1925, as William 'Billy' Kimber's Birmingham Boys clashed with Charles 'Darby' Sabini's gang from London.

Born in 1882, after joining the Peaky Blinders, the well-dressed Billy Kimber met the thug, George 'Brummie' Sage, who introduced him to the racetrack. As leader of the rebranded Birmingham Boys, or Brummagems, Kimber later allied with Charles 'Wag' McDonald of the Elephant and Castle gang, who helped him wage war on the West End gang, who were linked with the King's Cross Boys. The Elephant and King's Cross gangs had been shooting and stabbing each other's bookies for more than a decade.

After allying with powerful gangs in Leeds and Uttoxeter to seize control of the racecourses in the Midlands and North, Kimber cast his gaze to the southern race tracks, run by the notorious mobster, Darby Sabini, who led an Anglo-Italian-Jewish gang out of Clerkenwell. Sabini and his brothers had gotten involved in racing at the urging of a Jewish bookie named Eddie Emanuel, who asked them to protect him against the predations of Billy Kimber. With a secondary headquarters in North London's Islington, a precarious alliance with the Hoxton Gang, Kimber was now right at Sabini's doorstep.

In subsequent years, these gangs fought one another with increasing ferocity; with groups of up to 100 mobsters brutalising one another with hammers, spanners, mallets, bottles, knives, razors and guns. On one occasion, when Kimber obnoxiously barged into Sabini's King Cross flat, he was shot by Sabini's ally, the violent Jewish gangster, Alfred Solomon. However, true to the code of the streets, Kimber refused to give evidence at Solomon's trial, forcing the jury to rule it an accidental shooting. Later that year, the night before the Epsom Derby, another Brummagem was attacked in Covent Garden and left with 70 stitches. Enraged, the Birmingham Boys were determined to deal the Sabinis a critical blow.

However, rather than risk open combat at the Derby itself, where there was a huge police presence, they instead decided to set a trap. On the way back to London, they hid a car behind some bushes near Ewell, on a road they knew the Sabinis would have to take. When they spotted a pair of cars, believed to be their accursed foes, they pulled out and blocked the road, before surrounding the vehicle, ripping out the occupants and assaulting them in full view of a horrified Surrey crowd. In a violent bloodlust, they set upon them with all manner

of weapons, hacking off fingers, slashing faces and smashing arms to pieces. At one point, one of the enemies crawled to the roadside and spat, “You’ve made a bloomer, we’re Leeds men!” – the Birmingham Boys had attacked their allies. Horrified, his hammer-wielding attacker replied, “I hope not,” before advising him to hide behind some trees. Despite realising there were no Sabinis among their victims, rather than stopping, the rest of the frenzied gang proceeded to stomp them unconscious before fleeing.

As the Birmingham Boys fled back to London, Detective Inspector Stevens of the Flying Squad received a report that a Sinn Fein riot had occurred at Ewell and went to investigate. The Squad had been set up by the Metropolitan Police two years earlier amidst futile efforts to crack down on spiralling gang violence. Designed as a mobile unit of crack officers, who were less susceptible to complacency and bribery, the team was handed two Crossley Tenders, taken from the Royal Flying Corps – 26hp vehicles with no front brakes and aerials fitted to the roofs, which could reach speeds of 40 miles per hour.

Later, a constable spotted the attackers’ car outside a pub on Kingston Hill and went in alone. Wielding a revolver, he strolled in, coming face to face with 28 Birmingham Boys who were celebrating – having extorted £140 worth of silver the day before. When the officer declared them under arrest, they began charging at him, only to pause as he whipped out his revolver and declared “I shall shoot the first man who tries to escape!” – holding them until reinforcements arrived, to arrest the entire group. The incident handed Sabini a major victory, depriving Kimber of scores of men.

By 1925, the Home Secretary was determined to break the gangs’ hold over the tracks. However, Chief Inspector Frederick ‘Nutty’ Sharpe only had 12 detectives as part of the Flying Squad; each had to be incredibly brave and reckless in equal measure. On one occasion, Sharpe stood up to 40 Sabini gang members on his own, punching one in the face and scattering them from the racetrack. When a massive brawl – dubbed the ‘Battle of Waterloo’ – between the Sabini and Elephant and Castle gangs left eight people dead at the Duke of Wellington pub, the government finally decided to introduce sweeping new police powers, to undermine the gangs’ ability to act with impunity. The next year, after shooting into a Sabini club, Billy Kimber fled to the United States.

In the ensuing years, the Jockey Club and the Bookmakers Protection Association began working to break Sabini’s grip on south London’s pitches, and police stepped up surveillance. In 1932, the National Bookmakers’ Protection Association was set up to make pitch allocation fairer and wipe out intimidation; only a bookmaker approved by the BPA and Jockey Club could maintain a pitch. The last racecourse battle at Lewes took place on 8 June 1936, and the war itself was ironically brought to an end by the outbreak of World War Two, when Sabini was placed into an internment camp as an enemy ‘alien’ – despite being born in England and not even speaking Italian.

Portrayed by Tom Hardy in the show, the real-life Alfred Solomon was a violently unpredictable criminal, who served time for murder

Images: Alamy, Getty, Kevin Mcgivern (illustration)

In series three, Tommy enlists the help of Alfie Solomons (Tom Hardy) to outsmart the Russians and the Economic League

1924

SERIES THREE

58 **THE ECONOMIC LEAGUE**
Discover more about this shady organisation, fictionalised members of which serve as Tommy's adversaries in the third series

62 **FLIGHT OF THE ROMANOVS**
In this series, Tommy meets Romanov refugees living in Britain. Find out how some members of the Russian imperial family managed to escape the revolution

70 **FROM RUSSIA WITH LOOT**
While Tommy's vault robbery is pure fiction, the Romanovs' collection of beautiful treasures and jewels was quite real

Image: Alamy

The Economic League was a shadowy, covert organisation that had an extensive power base at the heart of government, industry and the media

SERIES THREE

SHADOWLAND THE ECONOMIC LEAGUE

For much of the 20th century, the far-right Economic League organisation used espionage and propaganda to blacklist left-wing workers and sympathisers

Words Neil Crossley

In an age when the concept of 'spin' has long since passed into common parlance, it's worth remembering that the manipulation of newspaper stories to meet political ends was alive and well over a century ago.

Back in 1919, a far right organisation named National Propaganda emerged in the UK, formed by a powerful group of politicians and industrialists committed to capitalism and opposed to left-wing organisations and individuals. In the decades that followed, no UK political organisation manipulated news stories to its own ends with quite such ruthless efficiency.

The organisation, which would change its name to the Economic League in 1926, has been likened to McCarthyism in late-40s and 50s America. Individuals were frequently blacklisted on the grounds of their left-wing political beliefs. Much of the Economic League's activity was covert yet its impact was profound and the implications of its actions still resonate to this day.

THE AGE OF REVOLUTION

As shadowy and subversive organisations go, the Economic League certainly ticks the boxes. The man who founded it in August 1919, MP William Reginald Hall, had been director of the naval intelligence division of the Admiralty from 1914 to 1919. During his time at the Admiralty, Hall, along with Sir Alfred Ewing, was responsible for the establishment of the Royal Navy's codebreaking operation, Room 40.

Like many of the governing classes, Hall was stunned by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and deeply fearful that growing industrial unrest would spark a similar insurrection in the UK. National Propaganda embarked on a 'Crusade for Capitalism', targeted at the workforce of local members' factories, and against the subversion of trade union activism and leftist political parties. The organisation set up and ran a blacklist of alleged 'subversive' workers, and made this available to its member companies.

By 1923, the leadership of National Propaganda passed to Sir Auckland Geddes, a former government minister and US ambassador. Two years later, National Propaganda was organised into a policy-making Central Council of 41 members, with 14 district organisations covering most industrial areas of the UK. Income came from tax-deductible company subscriptions and donations. Geddes changed the name of the organisation to the Central Council of the Economic League and in 1926 it became simply the Economic League.

By then, the Economic League had emerged as a real force to be reckoned with. This was not a group populated solely by idealists and fanatics. It was a highly structured and well-funded national organisation, comprising giants of industry, politics and the media. By 1925, it boasted two Lords, 15 knights, high-ranking military officers, directors of newspapers and Lord Gainford, chair of the BBC.

BARBARIANS AT THE GATE

In January 1924, the Economic League's worst fears were realised when the first Labour government was formed. For the League, it was proof that socialist barbarians were at the gate. The League's fifth annual report lamented this Labour Party victory. "The fact that there were found five and a half million British citizens willing to place in power as well as in office a body of men plunged in uneconomics, pledged to the nationalisation

"The Economic League had its members entrenched within every sector of industry, society, government, the media and academia"

of industry, and plighted in troth to subsidise Russian Bolshevism with British savings, is a measure of the educational work that remains to be done," the report frothed indignantly.

The scale and efficiency of the Economic League in gathering and disseminating intelligence on left wing activism is chilling. The League's annual report of 1925 shows that it was receiving high and low level intelligence from thousands of students at its 'study circles' as well as the firms represented by its 150 to 200 Central and Regional Council Members. The Economic League had its members entrenched within every sector of industry, society, government, the media and academia.

"It was a considerably more diverse and sophisticated operation than the state's own," noted Mike Hughes in his 1995 book *Spies at Work: Rise and Fall of the Economic League*, which documents the League's links with the secret state, its covert blacklisting activities on behalf of big business and its role as a political vetting agency. "The fledgling intelligence community was fortunate in having the Economic League's extensive network to augment its own slim resources. For, in the early 1920s, not only could the Economic League collect and collate intelligence, it could also pass it to the state's intelligence services."

THE GENERAL STRIKE

In 1926, John Baker White was appointed as the new director of the Economic League. He was an apt choice. White had been working since 1923 in the propaganda section of the mine owners' Mining Association. His appointment was timely. Within a month, the Economic League was embroiled in efforts to break the 1926 General Strike.

The Economic League focused its activities in Nottinghamshire as that was where the strike began to crack. The report noted that the League set up 'flying squads' to "get the miners back to work". New recruits were mainly unemployed ex-officers, including two ex-Black and Tans. The recruits were tough but the League's report claimed that its "special cadre of speakers and leaflet distributors … didn't go out at night alone" adding that "they were forced to replace the windscreens of their vans with chicken wire".

The 1926 General Strike lasted nine days. There seems little doubt that the League's

Fact vs fiction

"They're a law unto themselves," the malevolent Father Hughes (Paddy Considine) tells Thomas Shelby (Cillian Murphy) in series three of *Peaky Blinders*. "You can never quite grasp who they are. Like gripping wet soap." Hughes is referring to the Economic League, also known as Section D or the Oddfellows in the series, the shadowy organisation whose nefarious far-right activities underpin the series' central narrative. An organisation called the Economic League did exist in reality, but since many of its records were destroyed, the true extent of their influence remains a mystery.

“After WWII, the League continued to flourish, as state-sponsored blacklisting encouraged the organisation to pursue alleged communists with vigour”

actions accelerated the return to work and the eventual collapse of the strike. For the trade unions it was a disaster. The strike had been the most powerful weapon in their armoury and it had failed. The trade union membership was demoralised and its leadership's power was diminished.

DARK TIMES

By the 1930s, the Economic League was utilising the national press to great effect, as a pamphlet from 1933 notes: “In its work the League has never failed to realise the great value of the press as a medium for public education. In consequence it contributes letters and articles on economic questions to daily and weekly newspapers throughout the country.”

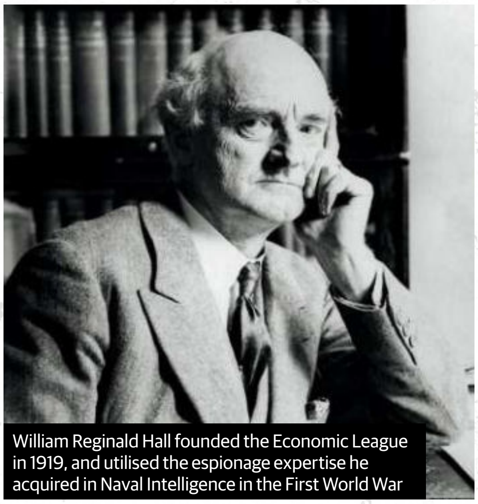
The early 30s were a time of massive unemployment, riots and hunger marches, such as the Jarrow Crusade. The Economic League ran a vigorous campaign against another hunger march, organised by the National Unemployed Workers Movement (NUWM). The League sent its flying squads of ‘propaganda vans’, speakers and leafleters to towns and villages in advance of the marchers with the aim of fuelling mistrust and hostility towards their cause.

“Anybody who supports the ‘Hunger march’ stunt,” read one such leaflet, “either by taking part in it, by attending the demonstrations arranged in connection with it, or by giving money to the March funds, is merely assisting a COMMUNIST PLOT to cause civil disorder… THINK THIS OVER AND DON'T BE DUPED BY THE REDS.”

In 1939, John Baker White stepped down as director of the Economic League. He was replaced by Colonel Robert Rawdon Hoare, and in the decades that followed the Second World War, the Economic League continued to flourish, as state-sponsored blacklisting encouraged the organisation to pursue alleged communists with vigour. By the 1950s the League was collecting centralised records on communist trade union organisers, some of which were collected from police files.

THE DEMISE OF THE LEAGUE

In the 60s and 70s, various newspapers began confirming the existence of the Economic League's blacklist of left-wing workers. On 12 January 1961, *The Daily Express* reported that companies could check whether “a prospective employee is listed as a Communist sympathiser”. After years of denials, the League finally confirmed to *The Observer* in 1969 that it held such files. Then in 1978, the League acknowledged to *The Observer* that it used these files to supply its members with information.


William Reginald Hall founded the Economic League in 1919, and utilised the espionage expertise he acquired in Naval Intelligence in the First World War

Father John Hughes (Paddy Considine) – a fictional member of the League – is the main antagonist in series three of Peaky Blinders

The Economic League used all means to encourage the enrolment of volunteer workers – known by the unions as ‘scabs’ – to break strikes

LONDON
ECONOMIC
LEAGUE
FACTS
A London Economic League representative addresses passers by at Speakers' Corner in Hyde Park, circa 1963

Investigations continued through the Eighties as journalists dug deeper. Three primetime ITV *World in Action* exposés led to a 1990 Parliamentary Employment Select Committee enquiry into the Economic League. The massive scale of the Economic League's operation shocked many. The Committee found that major companies, right up until 1990, had been actively screening applicants based on the League's blacklist. Pressure intensified when the BBC One investigative consumer series *Watchdog* reported on the League. Journalist Paul Foot then managed to obtain an entire copy of the blacklist and wrote a series of stories that ran in *The Daily Mirror*, exposing the organisation's 'kangaroo courts'. Finally in 1993, 74 years after its formation, the Economic League was dissolved.

LESSONS LEARNED

It seems fittingly ironic that an organisation which for decades so successfully manipulated the media to its own political ends, should be ultimately undone by that same media. What really stunned many was the sheer scale of the Economic League and the fact that it continued its shadowy and undemocratic actions right up until the tail end of the 20th century.

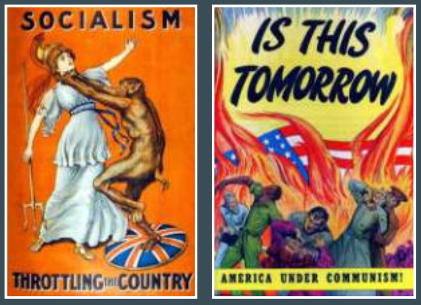
"Perhaps the most important of the various elements of the lethal cocktail that led to the demise of the League was the widely felt outrage at the League's blacklist," concluded Mike Hughes in *Spies at Work*. "It was that outrage which meant that the story of the League's blacklist ran and ran."

Hughes also argued that cynicism about politicians and political activists must never be allowed to degenerate into complacency: "We must continue to expect the highest degree of integrity and commitment to democratic principles from those in power, whether in politics with a big 'P' or in industry or the financial institutions," he wrote. "Even when, in fact, it doesn't surprise us when they fail to meet our expectations."

State Surveillance: UK vs US

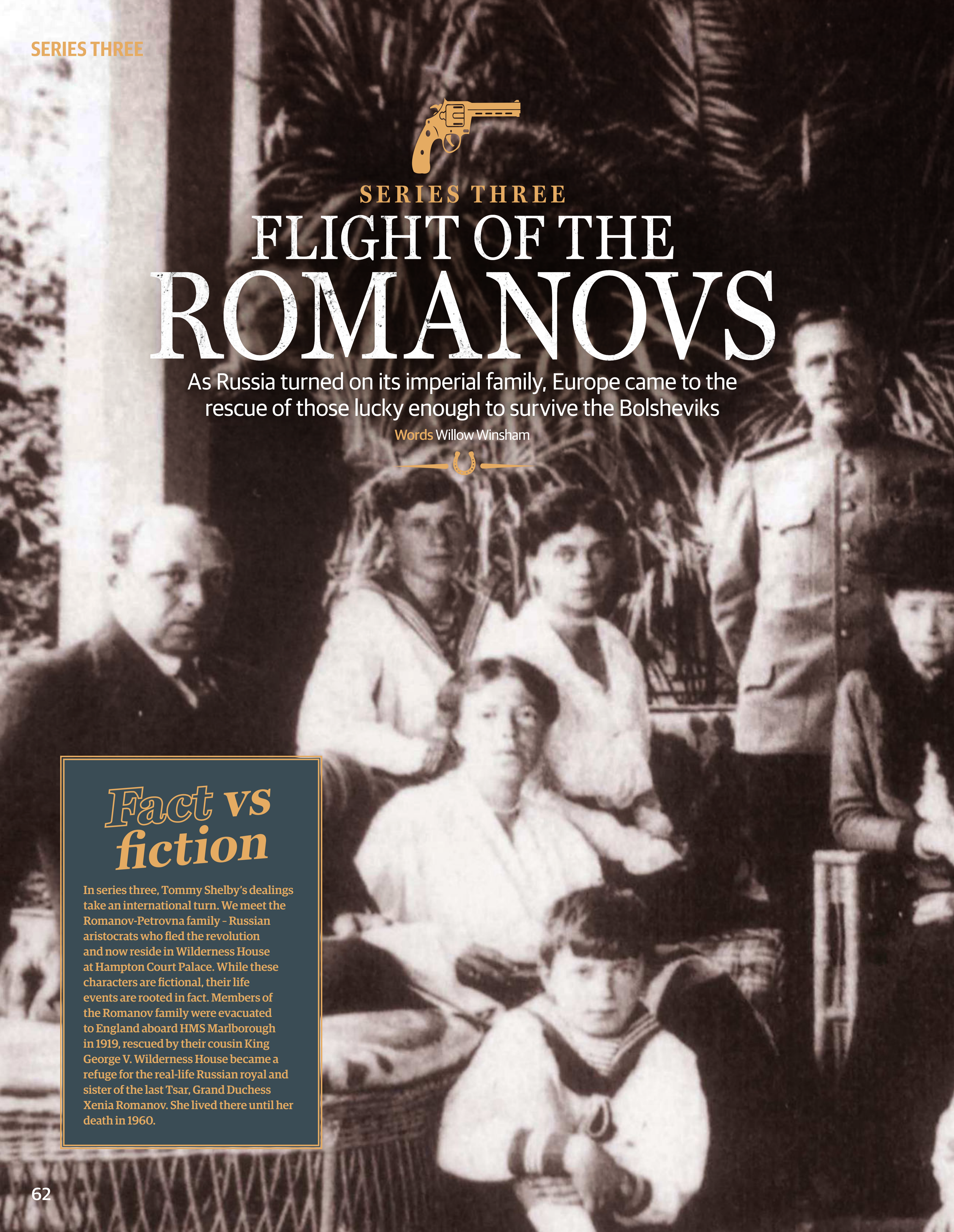
So profound was the British governing class's fear of revolution in the interwar years that there was a secret bar on communists being employed in government service. State surveillance of communists and their sympathisers was intense and bolstered significantly by the covert intelligence work of the Economic League. In a 2017 article in the *American Historical Review*, historian Jennifer Luff notes that the interwar British security services rivalled the Cold War-era FBI in the scale and scope of its surveillance operations. She also notes that British political policing operations dwarfed the American regime.

"While the American federal crackdown on communists was enacted democratically and publicly, the British built a 'secret state' whose operations were often hidden from public view," she observed. "A noisy civil liberties movement continually protested and publicised American political repression and helped to entrench knowledge of it for contemporaries and historians, whereas much of the UK's surveillance and policing of communists was unknown to the British public. As a result, historians have tended to overstate the stealth of the American security regime, and to understate the severity of the British."



The USA and the UK took different approaches to suppress communism and socialism throughout the 20th century, but both made effective use of propaganda.

Images: Getty; Shutterstock



SERIES THREE

FLIGHT OF THE ROMANOVS

As Russia turned on its imperial family, Europe came to the rescue of those lucky enough to survive the Bolsheviks

Words Willow Winsham

Fact vs fiction

In series three, Tommy Shelby's dealings take an international turn. We meet the Romanov-Petrovna family – Russian aristocrats who fled the revolution and now reside in Wilderness House at Hampton Court Palace. While these characters are fictional, their life events are rooted in fact. Members of the Romanov family were evacuated to England aboard HMS Marlborough in 1919, rescued by their cousin King George V. Wilderness House became a refuge for the real-life Russian royal and sister of the last Tsar, Grand Duchess Xenia Romanov. She lived there until her death in 1960.

The Romanov family under house arrest in the Crimea before their rescue in 1919

When Nicholas II was forced to abdicate in March 1917, there were few who could have foreseen where things would end for the Russian tsar and his immediate family. The tsar, his wife the former tsarina Alexandra, their four daughters, Olga, Tatiana, Maria and Anastasia and the young and ailing Alexei, the tsar's heir, suffered numerous humiliations and deprivations over the months to follow, the mighty brought devastatingly low.

By the fateful day of 16 July 1918, the family had been under house arrest in Ekaterinburg for 78 days. At the mercy of their Bolshevik captors, their spirits were low as, despite rumours of rescue, the days continued to pass and help did not arrive. That night, the family were woken and instructed to dress, before making their way downstairs. No doubt confused as to what was occurring, they were joined by the doctor who oversaw the care of the ailing tsarevich, the tsar's valet, the family cook, and a maid, the latter carrying the family jewels sewn inside a pillow, and were told that they were to be moved for their own safety as the advancing army was nearing Ekaterinburg. Instead of being taken from the house, the family were escorted into a basement, where they waited at the pleasure of their captors.

It was not until the arrival of a contingent of armed men, headed by Yakov Yurovsky, the man in charge of the guards who watched the former imperial family, that their fate became clear; Yurovsky informed the tsar that he and the others were to be shot.

The murder of the Russian imperial family is perhaps one of the best-known and most intriguing tragedies of the 20th century. Amid the rampant debate and speculation that surrounds the story, one of the recurring questions is why the terrible events happened at all, and, crucially, why were Nicholas II and his family left to suffer their horrendous fate - a destiny that had been predicted years before by many?

One direction in which the finger of blame has been pointed is towards the British monarch, King George V. First cousin to the ill-fated tsar, his failure - or downright refusal - to help Nicholas and his family has often been met with great censure from historians and enthusiasts alike. It cannot, of course, be denied that George failed to save his cousin and his family, but to what extent should he be tarred with such a legacy? Politically, there was good reason for George to think twice before offering refuge to his deposed cousin, despite the latter's perilous situation. Although the two were close and on good terms, the delicate political situation left the British king with a stark choice between family and his country and crown.

Indeed, in the wake of the Russian Revolution and the Great War, George was accused by some of being 'too German' due to his family connections: after all, the German kaiser was a first cousin of the British king, and the Russian tsar himself was a third cousin to

Wilhelm II. Letting the fleeing Romanovs into the country was, it was feared, a sure-fire way to bring revolution and chaos to Britain that the country and the monarch could ill-afford. Speaking in favour of George V, Prince Michael of Kent defended the king by maintaining that it was the vehement opposition of the British people that kept George from acting, and that even then, moves were made to rescue his cousin, with several plans made and thwarted before they could come to anything.

It must also be remembered that hindsight is perfect but useless: George cannot have known for certain the terrible fate that awaited 'Nicky' and his family. Rather than solely blaming the British king, blame has often been placed at the door of the prime minister of the time, David Lloyd George, with George V apologists insisting it was the minister who had the final say. This theory was discredited in the 1980s however, when sealed cabinet papers revealed that the prime minister had not been the one to sway the king's decision.

Another popular argument, especially within the British royal family, maintains that Queen Mary, George's wife, was the fly in the ointment and the reason for British refusal to give the Romanovs refuge. Derided as a heartless harridan and as having too much influence on the king, Mary has received bad press over the years for her supposed role in swaying her husband's mind. There has been no official proof of this however, and cabinet papers remain silent on the matter.

What of help from other quarters in Europe? Spain, Sweden and Norway, among others, all made moves to help the Romanovs, but such plans failed, evaporated or were turned down. It has been suggested that the tsar himself played a role in the ultimate fate of his family, and it seems that not only the tsar but also the wider Romanov family who remained in Russia, did not fully appreciate the danger that threatened them. Grand Duke Kirill, cousin to Nicholas II and the man who took his place as head of the family, was one of the few to take heed of the perilous situation in Russia: with permission granted by the Provisional Government, he moved to Borga, Finland, in June 1917.

This, however, was the first and only move from the family: due to a variety of factors, no more Romanovs were to leave Russia until late 1918, a delay which had grievous consequences and cost the lives of many. Ultimately, it must also be remembered that the tsar and his family had been held under house arrest with the belief – shared by the family and other powers of Europe – that they were to stand trial. That the unthinkable could happen was not something that either side had realised until it was much too late.

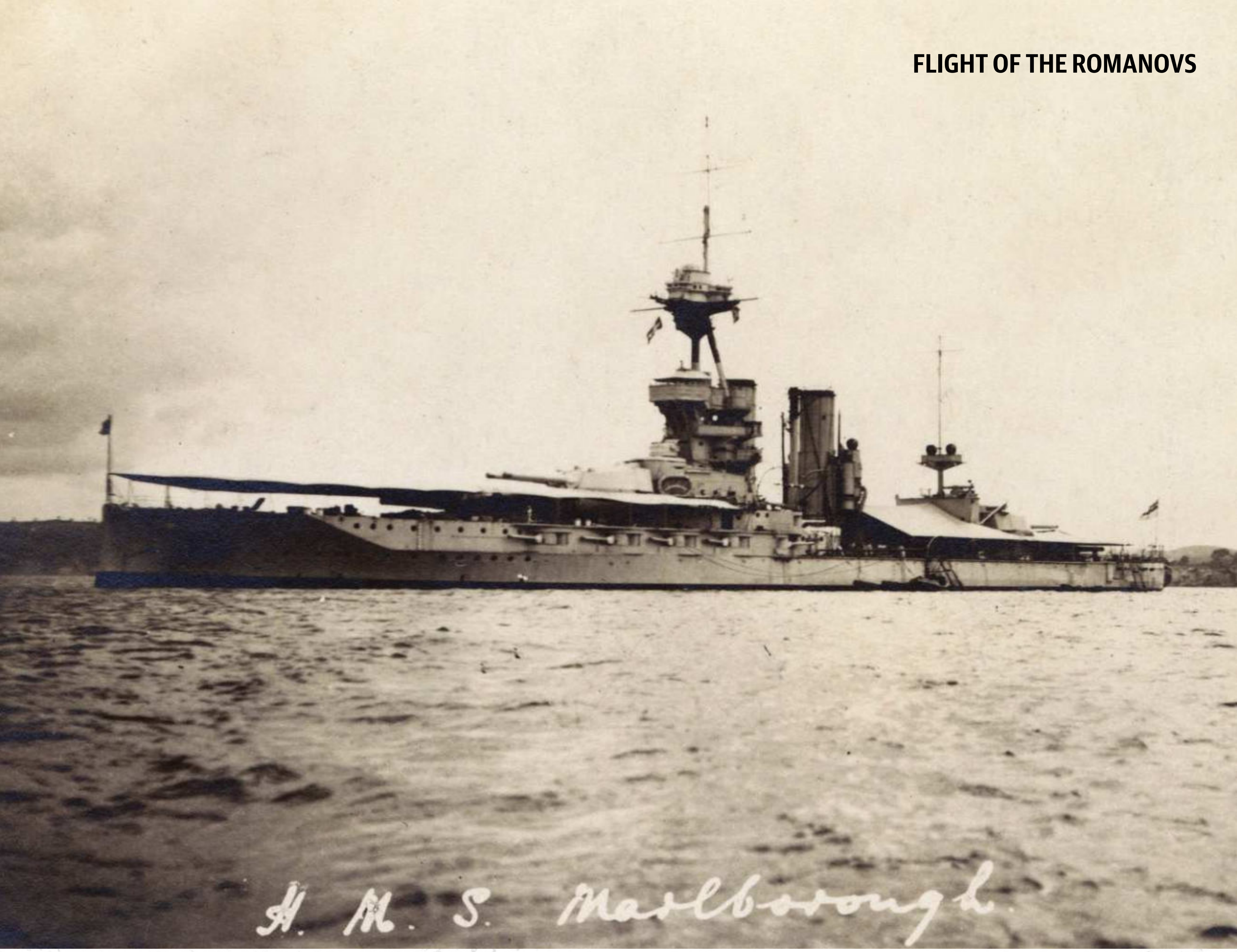
Unfortunately, the tsar and his family were not the only Romanov casualties during 1918. The tsar's younger brother, Grand Duke Michael, was murdered in Perm in June, just a month before the massacre of the tsar and his household at Ekaterinburg. To add to the tragedy, the tsarina's sister, Elisabeth, who had become a nun after the assassination of her husband, Grand Duke Sergei Alexandrovich, in 1905 was, along with one of the tsar's cousins and three princes of Romanov blood, buried alive in a mineshaft the night after the tsar was murdered. Tragically, the German kaiser, enemy to Britain and Russia, had offered refuge to Elisabeth on several occasions, but his help had been firmly rebuffed.

Maria Feodorovna fled Russia and took up residence in England, before returning to her homeland of Denmark

"The tsar and his family were not the only Romanov casualties during 1918"

Although the death of the tsar was finally admitted, no official word was given regarding his wife and children, or the other murdered Romanovs. Rumours abounded, and it was nearly impossible for those who remained to know the truth of what happened. But it became clear that the time had come to leave Russia, and as the year progressed, the exodus began.

Grand Duchess Elizabeth, the wife of Grand Duke Konstantine and mother of the princes that had been buried alive, took refuge in Sweden in November 1918.



Accompanying her were her two youngest children and two of her grandchildren. Prince Gabriel, the eldest son to survive of the Grand Duke Konstantine, was imprisoned but eventually released, finding refuge in Finland with the help of writer Maxim Gorki. Other members of the family were offered or sought refuge in Romania and Denmark, and this time help was more forthcoming. King Victor Emmanuel III of Italy and the kings of Montenegro and Sweden courted the Romanovs, with varying degrees of success. There were still those who were reluctant to leave however, and it was February 1920 by the time the last of the Romanovs left for good.

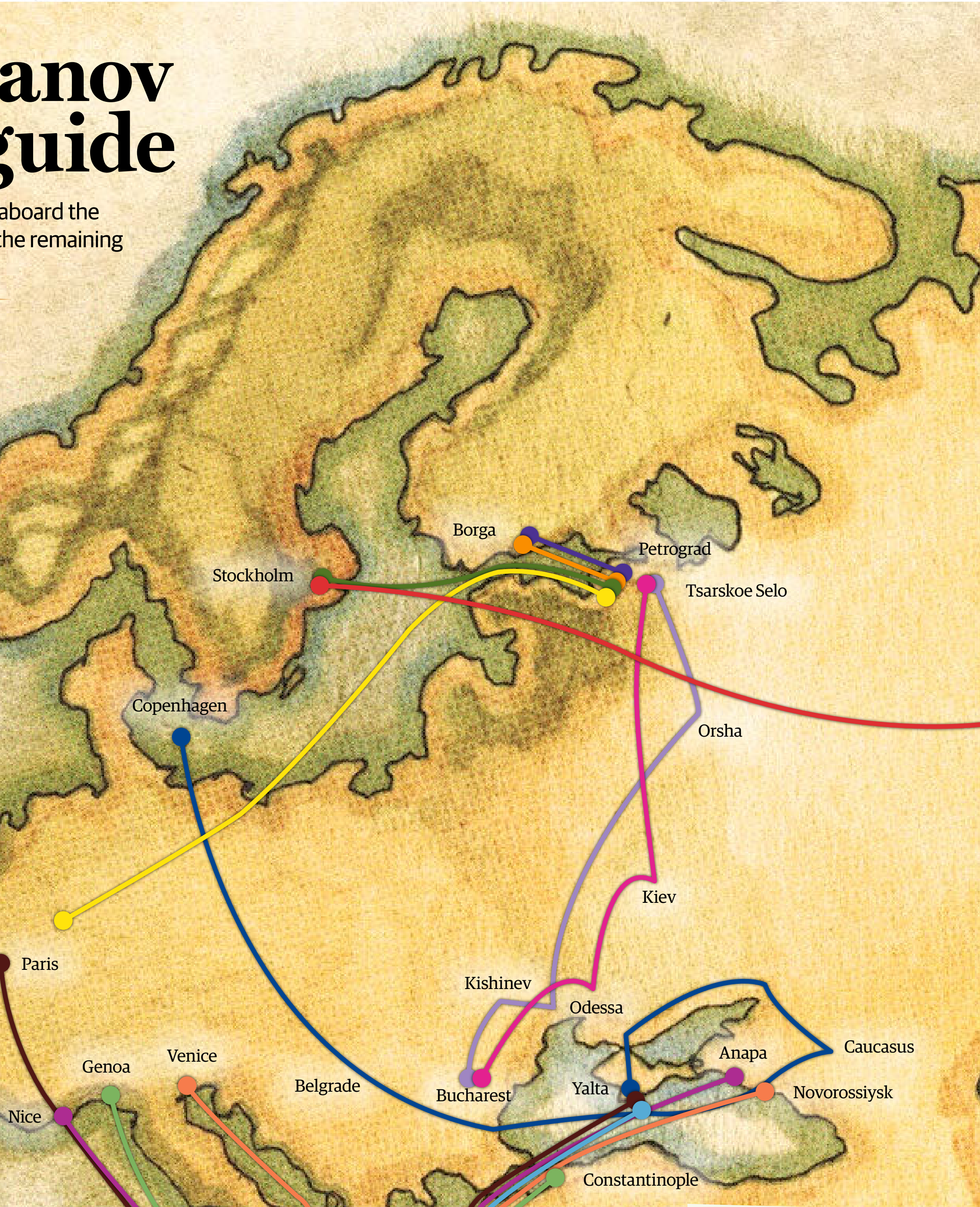
In spite of – or perhaps because of – the failure to rescue the tsar and his ill-fated family, Britain was at the forefront of the biggest rescue expedition launched to help the remaining Romanovs in Russia. The two largest and most prominent groups were those headed by the dowager empress, Maria Feodorovna – mother to the murdered tsar and Grand Duke Michael – and Grand Duke Nicholas, former commander-in-chief of the Russian Army and first cousin once removed of Tsar Nicholas II. The two families had been residing in the Crimea since retreating there in 1917, where they were effectively held under house arrest, the dowager empress inhabiting the estate of Ai-Todor while the Grand Duke Nicholas resided at the nearby Dulber estate.

Now, in the wake of the Armistice being signed, the British government was growing increasingly worried, and a concerted effort was made to extract the dowager empress – sister to Queen Alexandra, wife of Edward VII – before she could suffer the same fate as her massacred sons. Maria Feodorovna however, was less than co-operative; an initial plan for a secret rescue had already been rejected. When her sister, Alexandra, wrote in December of 1918, adding her voice to those who were, with varying degrees of firmness, telling the dowager empress that she should leave, Maria merely thanked her kindly for her concern but informed her sister that she would be remaining in Russia for Christmas. Matters grew increasingly pressing, until George V himself intervened. The Romanov parties from Ai-Todor and Dulber would be evacuated by the British

King George V with his cousin, Tsar Nicholas II

The Romanov survival guide

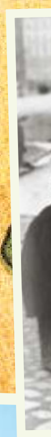
Not all of the Romanovs fled aboard the HMS Marlborough, so how did the remaining survivors escape?

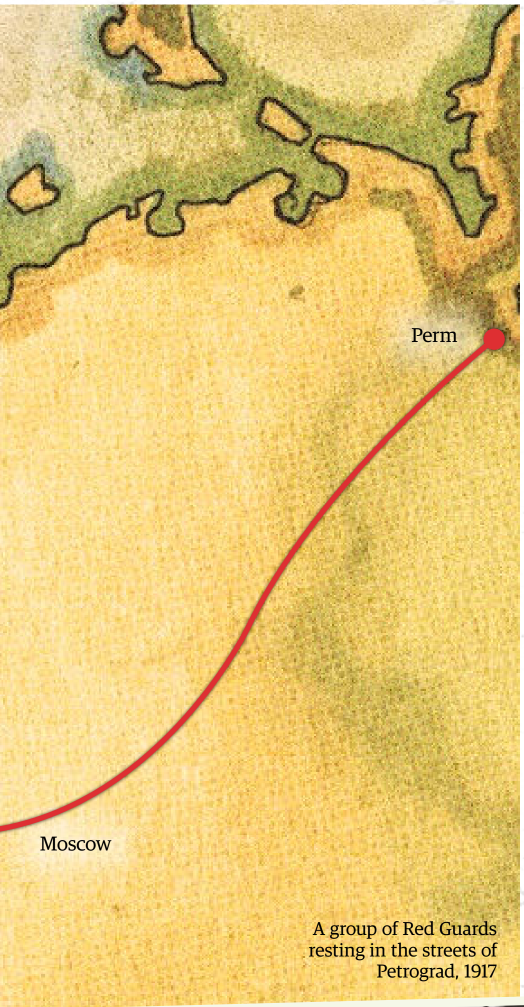

Borga
Petrograd
Stockholm
Tsarskoe Selo
Copenhagen
Orsha
Kiev
Paris
Kishinev
Odessa
Caucasus
Genoa
Venice
Anapa
Belgrade
Yalta
Novorossiysk
Nice
Bucharest
Constantinople
Malta

Amusing the Russian Refugees
The Travelling Basket

A Russian refugee plays aboard the HMS Marlborough

The estate at Dulber, Crimea, where Grand Duke Nicholas resided before his rescue





A group of Red Guards resting in the streets of Petrograd, 1917

ROUTE 1

Petrograd-Borga
Survivors:
Grand Duke Kirill Vladimirovich
Grand Duchess Victoria Feodorovna
Princess Kira Kirillovna
Princess Marie Kirillovna

In June 1917, Grand Duke Kirill, his pregnant wife and their daughters fled Petrograd to Borga, Finland, after receiving permission from the Provisional Government.

ROUTE 2

Petrograd-Borga
Survivors:
Prince Gabriel Konstantinovich
Antonina Rafailovna Nesterovskaya

Having been imprisoned in Petrograd, Prince Gabriel's wife, Antonina, and writer Maxim Gorki fought to bring about Gabriel's release, which happened in 1918. The couple fled to Finland, later settling down in Paris.

ROUTE 3

Petrograd-Stockholm
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Elizabeth Mavrikievna
Prince Georgy Konstantinovich
Princess Vera Konstantinovich
Prince Vsevolod Ivanovich
Princess Catherine Ivanovna

With permission from the government, the group accepted Queen Victoria of Sweden's invitation and set sail aboard the Angermanland in November 1918.

ROUTE 4

Tsarskoe Selo-Orsha-Odessa-Kishinev-Bucharest
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna the Younger
Prince Sergei Mikhailovich Puliatin

The couple fled Petrograd in July 1918, aiming to reach the south of Russia, which was held by German forces. After receiving an invite from Queen Marie of Romania, the pair sought refuge in Bucharest. To prove her royal identity, Marie stashed her papers in a bar of soap, ensuring the pair were quickly taken to safety.

ROUTE5

Perm-Moscow-Stockholm
Survivors:
Princess Elena Petrovna

Having been captured and taken prisoner, Helen was sent to prison in Perm. With the insistence of Norwegian diplomats, she was moved to Moscow and later fled Russia to Sweden.

ROUTE 6

Petrograd-Switzerland
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Olga Konstantinovna

The dowager queen of Greece had returned to her homeland, where she set up a military hospital when WWI broke out. When she tried to leave Russia, she was retained. It was only when the Danish government intervened that she was permitted to leave. She went to Switzerland to join her son, Constantine I of Greece.

ROUTE 7

Tsarskoe Selo-Kiev-Odessa-Bucharest
Survivors:
Princess Tatiana Konstantinovna
Prince Teymuraz Constantinovich Bagration
Princess Natalia Constantinovna Bagration

Tatiana and her children had lived with her uncle, but upon his arrest she fled south through Kiev and Odessa, finally reaching Romania in 1919.

ROUTE 8

Yalta-Paris
Survivors:
Grand Duke Alexander Mikhailovich
Prince Andrei Alexandrovich
Elisabetta Ruffo Di Sant'Antimo

Under the pretence of representing the Romanov family at the Paris Peace Conference, Grand Duke Alexander fled with his eldest son and daughter-in-law aboard the HMS Forsythe in December 1918.

ROUTE 9

Anapa-Constantinople-Nice
Survivors:
Grand Duke Boris Vladimirovich
Zina Sergeivna Raschevskaya

Boris escaped Russia via Anapa with his mistress (later his wife). The pair eventually settled in France.

ROUTE 10

Yalta-Constantinople-Malta
Survivors:
Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna
Grand Duchess Xenia Alexandrovna
Princess Irina Alexandrovna Yusupova
Prince Felix Yusupov
Prince Felix Felixovich
Princess Zinaida Nikolaevna
Princess Irina Felixovna Yusupova
Prince Feodor Alexandrovich
Prince Nikita Alexandrovich
Prince Dmitri Alexandrovich
Prince Rostislav Alexandrovich
Prince Vasili Alexandrovich

ROUTE 11

Constantinople-Genoa
Survivors:
Grand Duke Nicholas Nikolaevich
Grand Duchess Anastasia Nikolaevna (of Montenegro)
Prince Sergei Georgievich
Princess Helen Georgievna of Leuchtenberg
Count Stefan Tyszkiewicz
Grand Duke Peter Nikolaevich
Grand Duchess Militza Nikolaevna
Prince Roman Petrovich
Princess Marina Petrovna
Princess Nadejda Petrovna Orlova
Prince Nicholas Vladimirovich Orlov
Princess Irina Nikolaevna Orlova

ROUTE 12

Yalta-Caucasus-Novorossiysk-Belgrade-Copenhagen
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Olga Alexandrovna
Nicholas Alexandrovich Kulikovsky
Tikhon Nikolaevich
Guri Nikolaevich

Initially travelling the same route to Yalta as her mother, Dowager Empress Maria Feodorovna, Olga was determined to stay in Russia and travelled along the coast to Novorossiysk. In early 1920 the family fled to Serbia, and later on to Copenhagen.

ROUTE 13

Novorossiysk-Venice
Survivors:
Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna the Elder
Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich
Mathilda-Marie Feliksovna Kschessinskaya
Prince Vladimir Andreivich Krassinsky

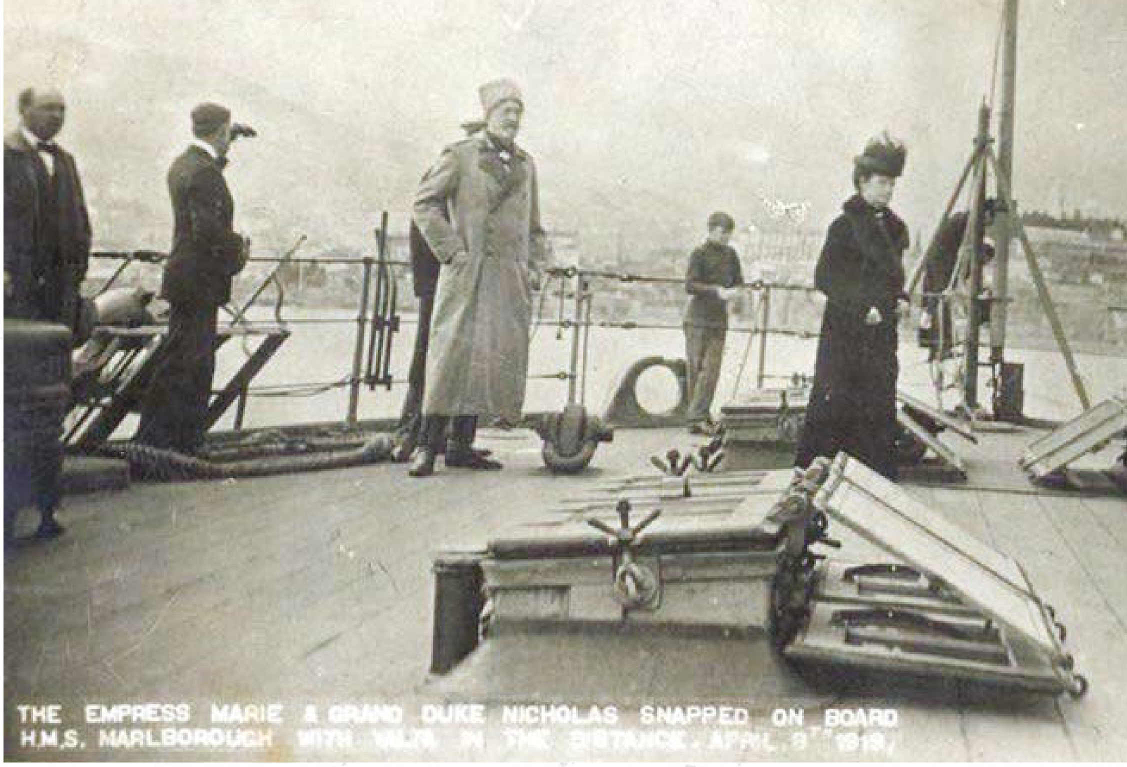
The last of the Romanovs to flee Russia, Maria, her son, his mistress and their child fled on the Semiranisa, an Italian liner that took them to Italy.

San Anton Palace in Malta, where Maria Feodorovna resided for a matter of days before continuing her journey to Britain

Navy along with other refugees and taken to safety, and plans were drawn up for the operation to be carried out quickly. Even then it was April 1919 before the dowager empress accepted the inevitable, finally agreeing to leave only after she was assured that her own ship would be the last to leave Russia.

The HMS Marlborough was to remove the remaining Romanovs from the Crimea – a war ship that might be considered ill-designed for the carrying of such esteemed passengers. Within any family tensions exist, and the Romanovs were no exception. This fact was exacerbated by the heightened political situation in Russia and the circumstances they had lived through. Maria Feodorovna and Grand Duke Nicholas, despite being neighbours in their Crimean estates, were decidedly at odds with one another, and this feud was to echo bitterly through the voyage.

The 7 April 1919, the day designated for the families to embark, did not get off to a good start; Maria Feodorovna was late to arrive, causing worry and annoyance among family and crew alike. Once the Romanovs were aboard, it was apparent that the captain of the HMS Marlborough had been ill-informed, as there were many more people than they had expected, not to mention the family dogs. There was a vast quantity of unlabelled luggage that had to be reunited with each owner, a feat finally achieved by



THE EMPRESS MARIE & GRAND DUKE NICHOLAS SNAPPED ON BOARD
H.M.S. MARLBOROUGH WITH YALTA IN THE DISTANCE. APRIL 9th 1919.

Maria Feodorovna and Grand Duke Nicholas photographed on board the HMS Marlborough with Yalta disappearing in the distance in April 1919

Empress Maria Feodorovna's bedroom (left) and study (right) at Hvidøre, her residence in Denmark

"Four generations of Romanovs were on board the HMS Marlborough"

first lieutenant Pridham with the help of the Grand Duchess Marina, the only one aboard who could speak Russian and English. There were some striking personages on board the Marlborough that day. Grand Duke Nicholas had arrived in full military uniform, proud and resplendent. Four generations of Romanovs were on board, a poignant representation of what remained of the once-great family.

It was an emotional day: the sons of Grand Duchess Xenia had each taken a bag of soil from the Ai-Todor estate from the area that held most meaning. And with some hasty adjustments (and grumbling from the dowager empress at the taking of the best sleeping spots by Grand Duke Nicholas and his party), the exiles were settled into what was to be their home for the journey.

More refugees making up the remnants of the Russian aristocracy and 200 tonnes of luggage were taken on board British ships at Yalta over the next few days. As promised, the HMS Marlborough was the last to depart, setting sail on 11 April. It was not a moment too soon; Yalta became a bloodbath shortly after, those who remained there at the mercy of both Red and White Armies as the town descended into chaos.

The Romanov refugees were stoical about their situation. The dowager empress ensconced herself on deck and received company there on a daily basis, while the princes experimented with magic tricks and the children roamed the ship, amusing and exasperating the crew. Despite their differences, one thing all the fleeing Romanovs held in common was a love of food, which was hardly surprising after the months of deprivation they'd experienced; meat had been an infrequent luxury, and the memory of coffee made from roasted acorns one that would not be quick to fade.

Despite memorial services being held for the tsar and Grand Duke Michael at Ai-Todor, the dowager empress flatly refused to entertain the notion that her sons were dead by the time she embarked the HMS Marlborough. She clung to the belief that he was still alive throughout the voyage. Indeed, it was five years after her voyage on the HMS Marlborough that the death of Grand Duke Michael was proven without a doubt, while the remains of the tsar and his family had still not yet been discovered before her death in 1928, at the age of 80 in Denmark.

One thing that is striking from the accounts is the fondness with which the crew of the HMS Marlborough came to hold their passengers. In return, it seems that the Romanovs held the ship's officers with high regard. As an expression of this, Maria Feodorovna, Grand Duke Nicholas and their families were keen not to cause trouble for their hosts, going out of their way to be polite, courteous, and grateful for every kindness. The friendships made during the voyage did not dissolve when the families left either; many kept in touch, and Pridham not only named his third child after the dowager empress, but asked that Maria Feodorovna be the child's godmother. Something else that was remarked upon was how the Romanovs treated the servants that had accompanied them into exile; rather than the haughty, imperious tyrants portrayed across the British press, the exiles were at pains to make sure their retainers had every comfort that could be given to them.

Throughout the voyage, the eventual destination for the fleeing families was uncertain. Malta was mooted as an option, and official, albeit secret, preparations were made in that direction, with telegrams exchanged and instructions given for the governor's house to be readied for the use of the dowager empress herself. There were mixed messages, however, as another telegram to the Admiralty stated that the dowager and her family were to be taken to England, while the Grand Duke Nicholas and his party were destined for Constantinople before journeying onwards. It was this latter scenario that was to prove correct, and the two parties went their separate ways, with the grand duke and his relations transferring to the HMS Nelson, to travel on to Genoa, Italy. Grand Duke Nicholas and his party left the Marlborough on 16 April and the ship set sail the day after, taking them on their way and leaving the dowager empress and her party to continue on alone, effectively ending their voyage feud.

Easter – a time of great importance to the Romanovs – was spent on board the Marlborough, with gifts swapped between exiles and crew. Gifts were also exchanged on 20 April, their final night on board, and the next day Maria Feodorovna and her party transferred to HMS Nelson to continue to England. This was not to be the dowager's final residence however, and her time in England with the royal family was to prove short-lived. Come August 1919 she was ready to move on, tensions between her and her sister along with a dissatisfaction at her decline in status prompting a move to Denmark, her country of birth. After an equally tumultuous time with her nephew, King Christian, she finally retired to Hvidøre, where she remained until her death several years later.

The remains of the tsar and his family were discovered in 1991 and laid to rest in St Petersburg; the remains of Alexei and the remaining daughter were finally discovered in 2007. The Russian Church Abroad canonised the murdered Romanovs in 1981, but it wasn't until 2000 that the Russian Orthodox Church did the same. Nearly a century after the slaughter of the tsar and his family and the escape of the remaining Romanovs, the question of whether the appalling events of 1918 could have been averted and who could or should have done so, is still not easily answered. But it is hoped that the much maligned and venerated family has finally found peace.

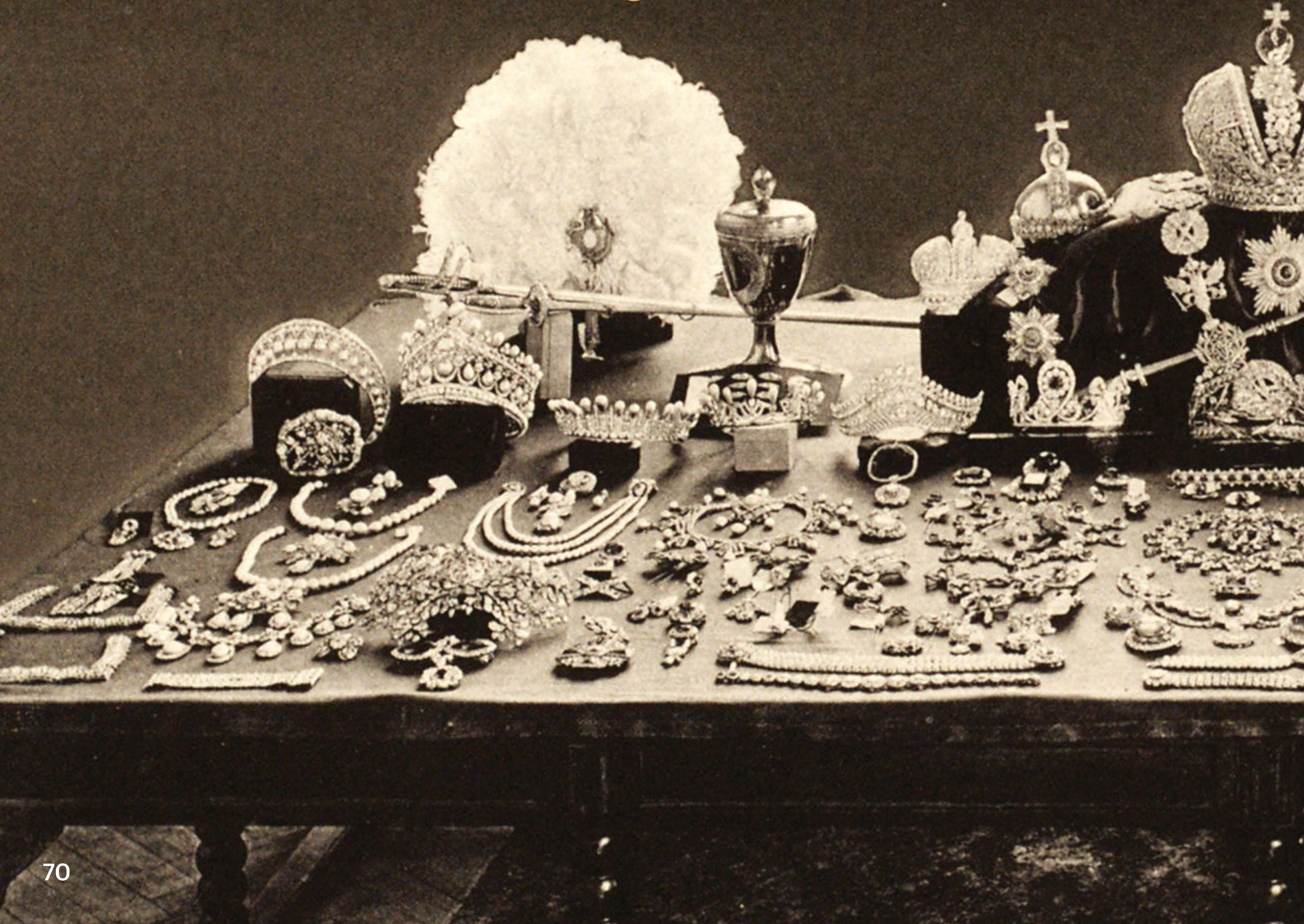
© Alamy, Shutterstock, Textures.com

SERIES THREE

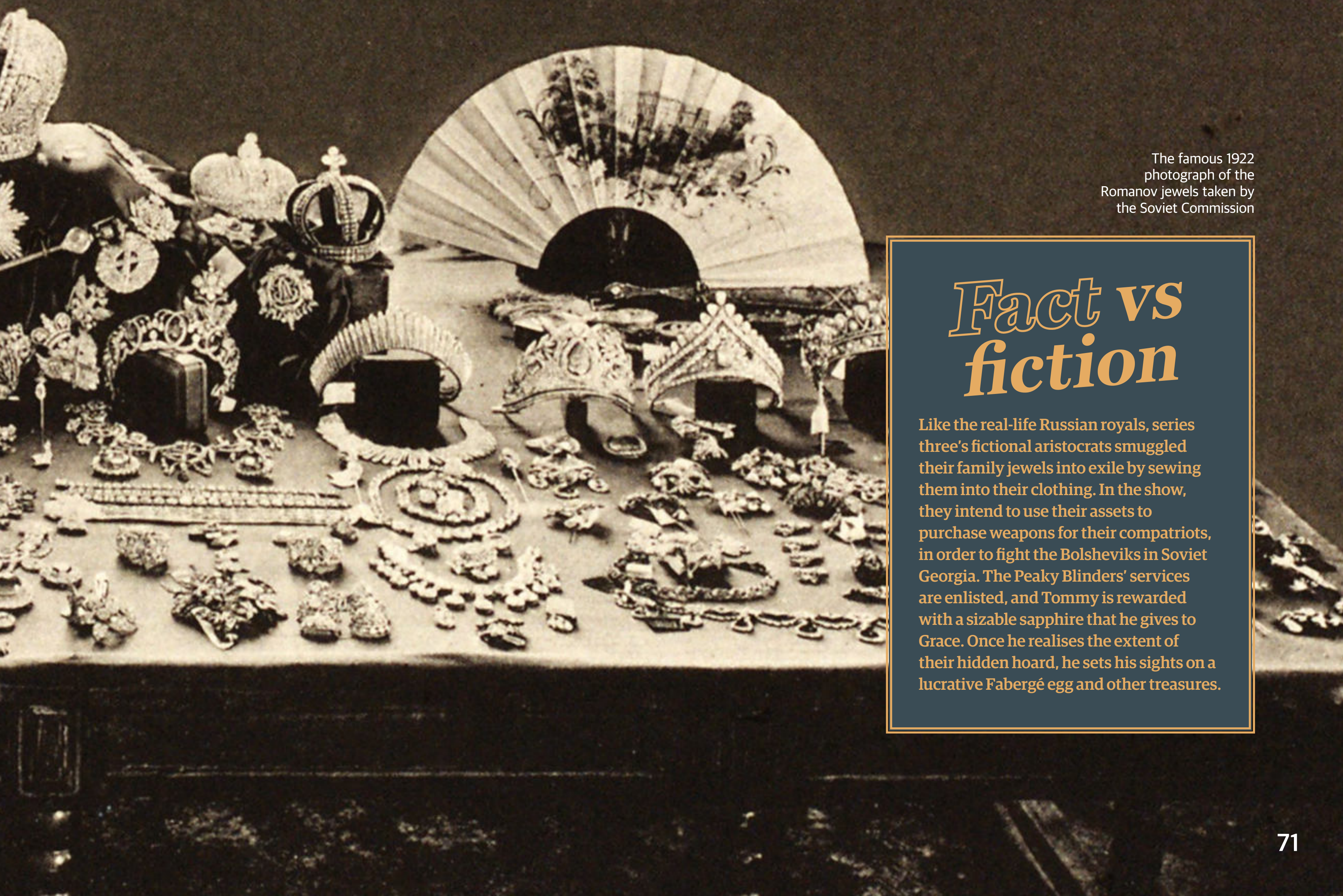
FROM RUSSIA WITH LOOT

The Romanovs were the wealthiest dynasty in the world in 1914, so what happened to their riches after the revolution?

Words Penny Wilson



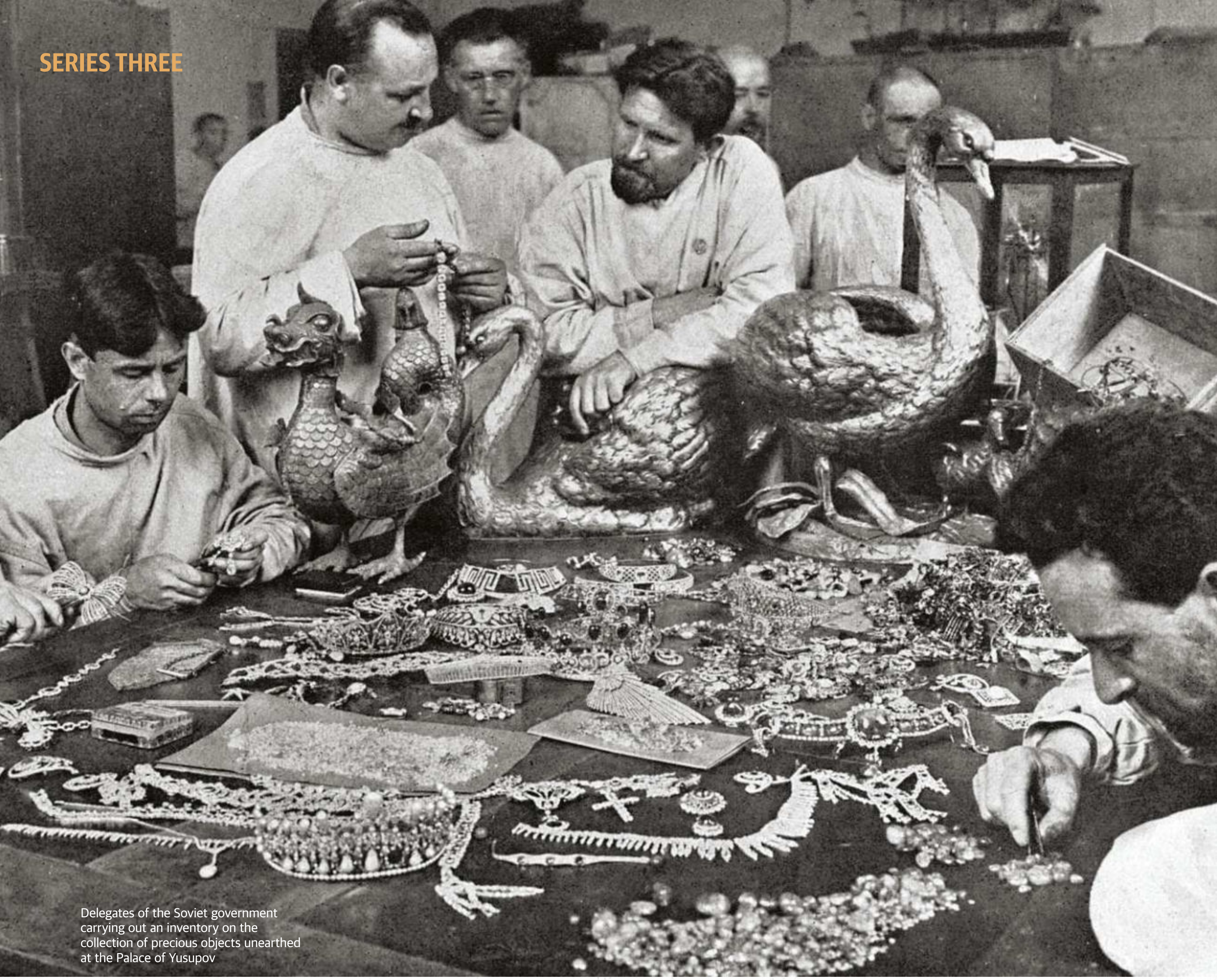
> “Peter the Great had established the Diamond Fund, intended to belong to the Romanov dynasty in perpetuity and forbidden to be sold, given away or altered”



The famous 1922 photograph of the Romanov jewels taken by the Soviet Commission

Fact vs fiction

Like the real-life Russian royals, series three’s fictional aristocrats smuggled their family jewels into exile by sewing them into their clothing. In the show, they intend to use their assets to purchase weapons for their compatriots, in order to fight the Bolsheviks in Soviet Georgia. The Peaky Blinders’ services are enlisted, and Tommy is rewarded with a sizable sapphire that he gives to Grace. Once he realises the extent of their hidden hoard, he sets his sights on a lucrative Fabergé egg and other treasures.



Delegates of the Soviet government carrying out an inventory on the collection of precious objects unearthed at the Palace of Yusupov

When the last emperor of Russia, Nicholas II, led his country into WWI in 1914, he was at the head of the wealthiest family in the world. Reigning for 300 years over one-sixth of the earth's surface, the Romanovs had amassed a fortune that would be worth some $280 billion today. Less than four years later, Nicholas and his immediate family would be dead, murdered by the newly instated communist government, and the treasure would be seized by the Bolsheviks. What could be moved was broken apart, weighed, measured and sold – scattered across the world like flotsam from a great shipwreck washed up on shore, all that was left of the greatest ever royal collection.

Following his abdication, Nicholas was taken to his home at the suburban Alexander Palace as a prisoner; here, he and his family began what would be 481 days of captivity in relative comfort. The family was allowed reasonably good access to living quarters and private gardens, where they passed the time planting vegetables. The Romanovs had been hoping to depart Russia for exile in the UK, but it seemed as though their royal cousins, King George V and Queen Mary, refused them refuge, perhaps fearing that the Russians would bring with them the infection of revolution. Alternate foreign exile seemed equally problematic, and the chairman of the post-abdication Provisional Government, Alexander Kerensky, took the decision to send the family into internal exile at a quiet provincial town in Siberia called Tobolsk.

Kerensky knew that his own time in power was running out, much as Nicholas's had done. The Bolshevik party of Vladimir Lenin was gaining strength and power among the disparate factions in a Russia where revolutionary fervour still seethed and threatened – and Lenin was much less well-disposed towards former imperial personages than he was the Provisional Government. Kerensky knew that once Lenin had overthrown the Provisional Government, he would take aim at the exiled Romanovs.

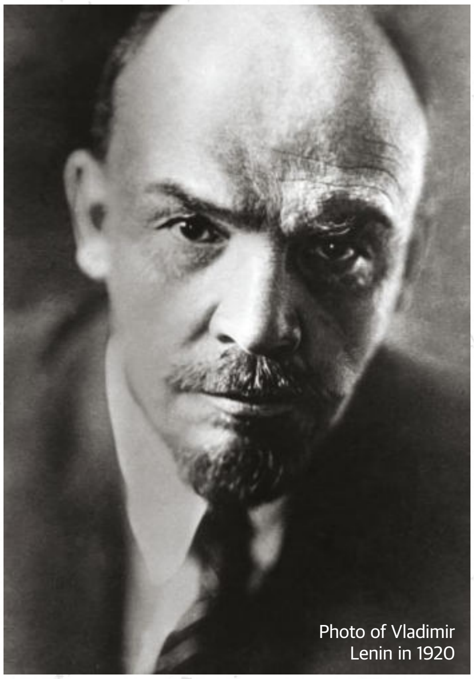
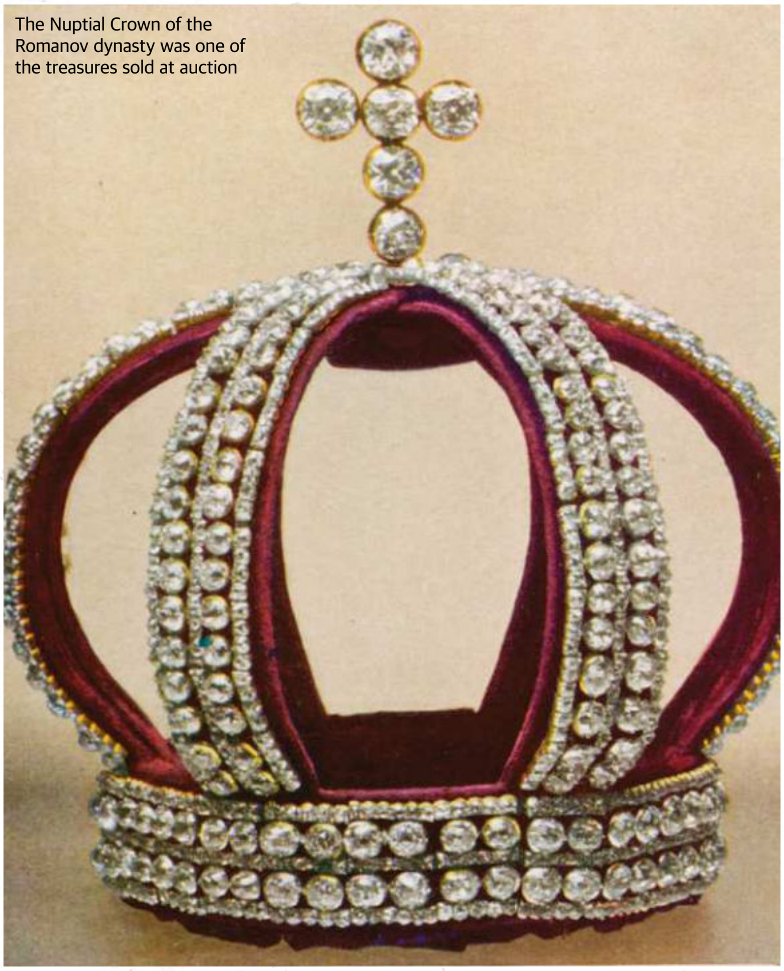
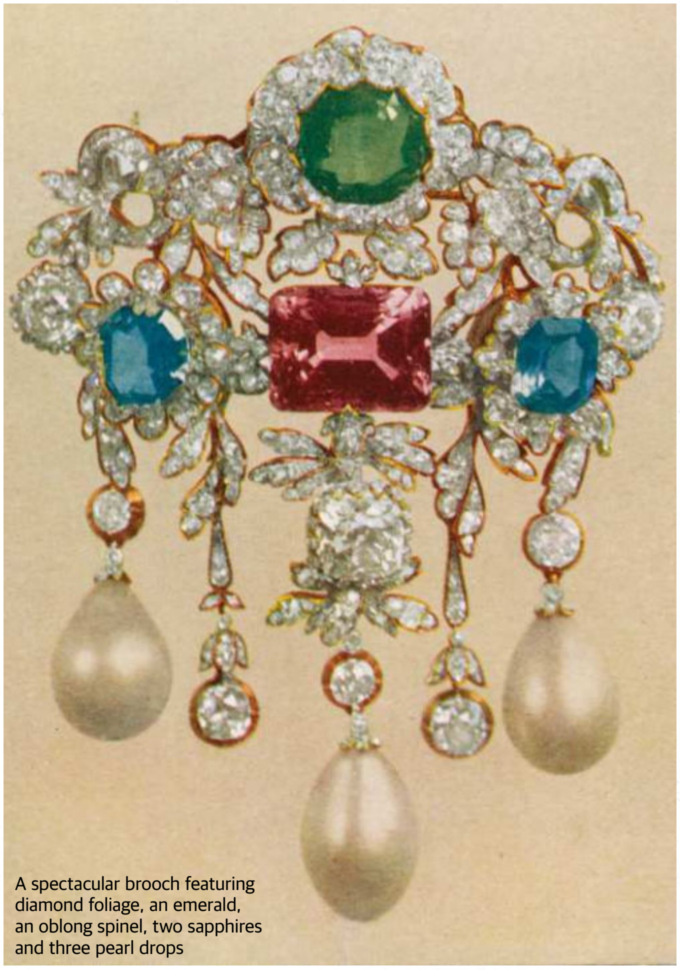


Photo of Vladimir Lenin in 1920


The Nuptial Crown of the Romanov dynasty was one of the treasures sold at auction


A spectacular brooch featuring diamond foliage, an emerald, an oblong spinel, two sapphires and three pearl drops

> “By the outbreak of World War I, there was an almost incalculable wealth of jewels in the Diamond Fund”

So, on 31 July 1917, the last imperial family gathered in a large, semi-circular hallway in Alexander Palace to await the automobiles that would take them the short distance from their home to their private railway station, where they would embark on a train bearing the flags and insignia of the Japanese branch of the Red Cross. They waited in growing anxiety through the night until around 5am, when their cars appeared. They left their house with 42 faithful friends and retainers – many of who would die for their loyalty – and 50 large packing cases containing clothes, books, household supplies, medications, china and glassware, silver and gold plates and a massive amount of personal jewellery belonging to the former empress and the four young grand duchesses, as well as ceremonial swords and court jewellery and trinkets. The children's English tutor, Sidney Gibbes, guessed that the value of the jewellery was well in excess of 1 million roubles. Gibbes's guess was conservative: the value of the treasure taken east into exile by the Romanov family totalled 2.8 million roubles in value in 1917 (in modern standards, that totals about £15 million or $18.5 million).

Despite the staggering amount of treasure that the imperial family took into exile in their luggage, they also left behind an incredible wealth in palaces, furniture, works of art and even more jewels and jewellery. During his reign, Peter the Great had established the Diamond Fund, which was a delegated collection of crowns, sceptres, orbs, diadems, tiaras, necklaces, bracelets and other adornments intended to belong to the Romanov dynasty in perpetuity and forbidden to be sold, given away or altered. Additionally, each succeeding emperor or empress was expected to add to the fund, which meant that by WWI, there was an almost incalculable wealth of jewels in the Diamond Fund, including examples in various styles such as rococo and neo-gothic, as well as several famous stones like Caesar's Ruby and a piece believed to have been cut from the legendary Hope Diamond.

These imperial treasures were stored in a safe room in the Winter Palace, but as a precautionary measure, the entire Diamond Fund was ordered to be removed, and was sent by train to Moscow, where it was installed in vaults beneath the Kremlin for safe-keeping for the duration of the war. There it stayed until 1926, when the cache was discovered by the Bolsheviks. The collection was taken out, cleaned, photographed and catalogued before being divided up. Part of the collection – the larger, more historically and nationally significant pieces including the coronation regalia – were kept in the Kremlin, where they finally went on display in 1967. They remain there today, and can be seen by visitors to the Armoury Museum and the Diamond Fund.

The other part of the Diamond Fund, which amounted to almost 70 percent of the collection, was allocated for sale. Through a consortium of British dealers, most of these items were sold at auction at Christie's. They were offered in 124 lots on 16 March 1927, but each lot may have included pairs or sets of items. A sword with a hilt and guard entirely encrusted with brilliants and previously belonging to Emperor Paul was auctioned, and so was a diamond tiara in the form of wheat-sheafs with foliage, which had once been a favourite of Paul's wife and which was donated to the Fund at the time of her death. The whereabouts of many of these items is unknown, but we do know where some of them ended up, and among the latter is the Romanov Nuptial Crown.

The Nuptial Crown had been fashioned out of approximately 1,500 old-mine diamonds that had once adorned the clothing of Catherine

THE LOST IMPERIAL FABERGÉ EGGS

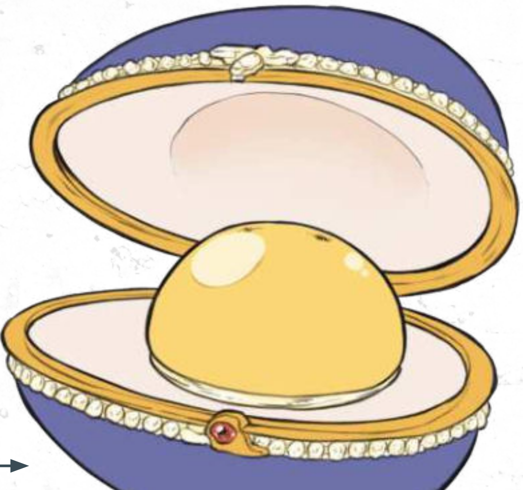
Somewhere out there, several eggs are waiting to be found

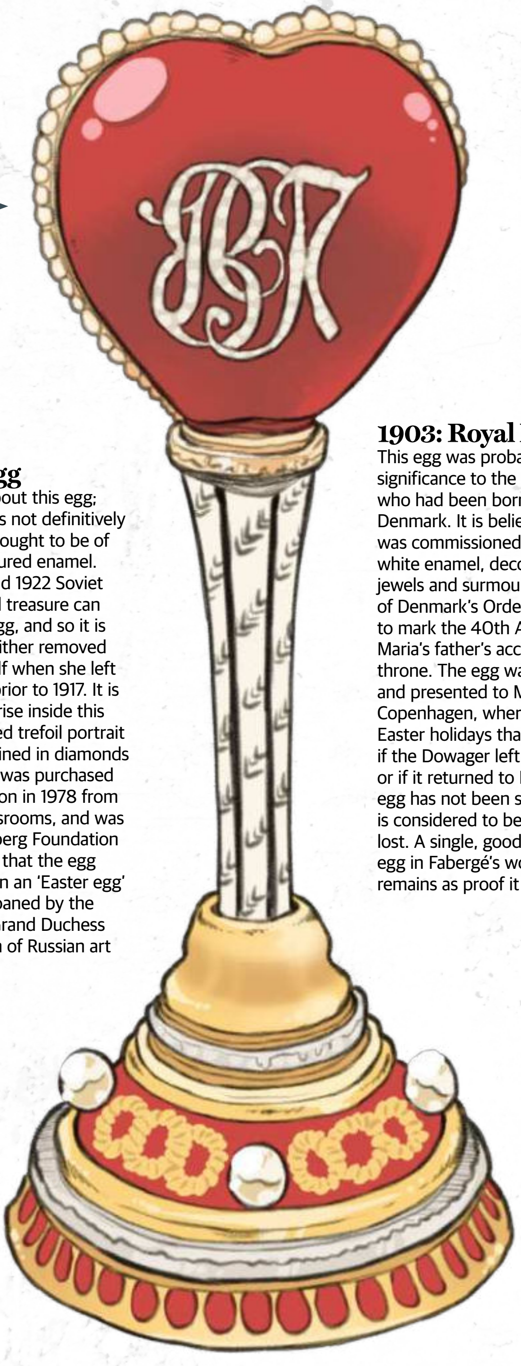
There are few collections of art so associated with a dynasty as the imperial Fabergé eggs are associated with the Romanovs. Of the 50 completed eggs, the whereabouts of 43 are known and confirmed, though some were missing for years. Six imperial eggs are missing, and the authenticity of one 'found' egg is disputed. Most of them are from the early years of the series; quite possibly, as their designs are much simpler than the later eggs, they may not have received the same attention as the more elaborate and decorative eggs, and may have been sold on as mere trinkets.

All seven of the missing eggs are from the collection of the Empress Maria Feodorovna.

1886: Hen egg with Sapphire Pendant

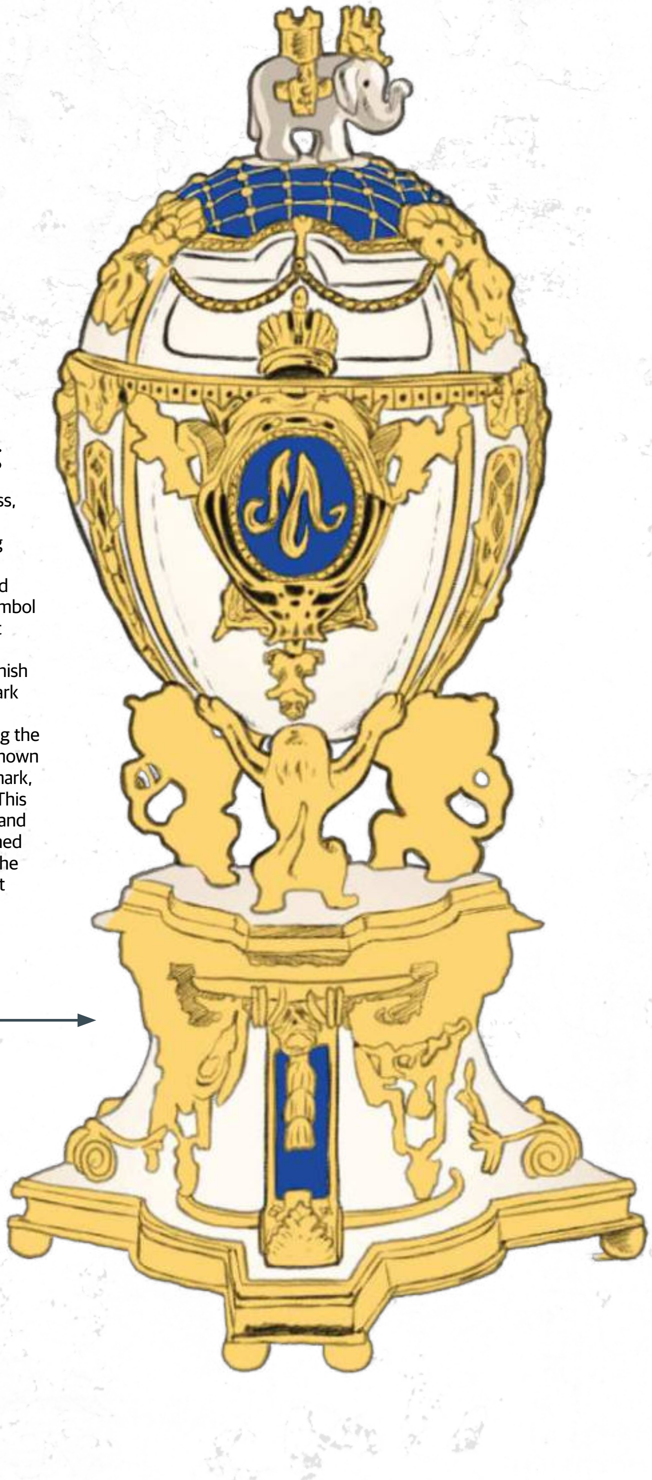
This object is described as a gold hen, dotted with rose-cut diamonds, picking a sapphire egg pendant out of a jewelled basket. As a gift from her husband, Alexander III, no doubt the Empress treasured this egg and it is known that it survived the Revolution. In 1922, an object described as "one silver hen, speckled with rose-cut diamonds, on gold stand" was taken to the Sovnarkom salesrooms. It is possible that this is the hen





1897: Mauve egg

Very little is known about this egg; even its composition is not definitively known, though it is thought to be of gold with mauve-coloured enamel. No item in the 1917 and 1922 Soviet inventories of imperial treasure can be identified as this egg, and so it is assumed that it was either removed by the Empress herself when she left Russia, or it was lost prior to 1917. It is thought that the surprise inside this egg was a heart-shaped trefoil portrait frame with '1897' outlined in diamonds on its cover; this item was purchased by the Forbes Collection in 1978 from Christie's Geneva salesrooms, and was sold on to the Vekselberg Foundation in 2004. It is possible that the egg survived to 1935, when an 'Easter egg' with miniatures was loaned by the Empress's daughter, Grand Duchess Xenia, to an exhibition of Russian art

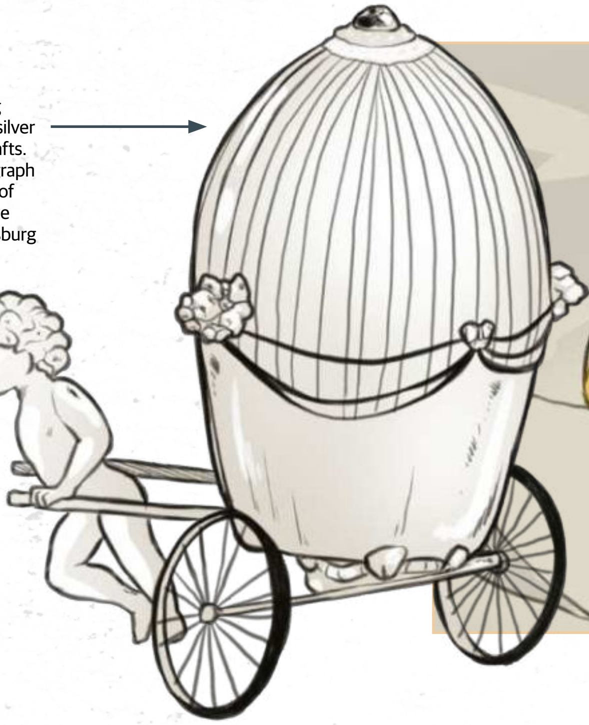


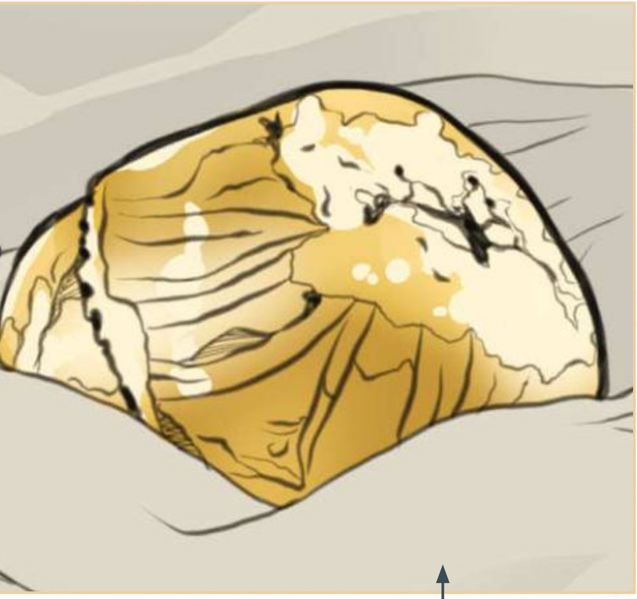
1903: Royal Danish egg

This egg was probably of particular significance to the Dowager Empress, who had been born a Princess of Denmark. It is believed that the egg was commissioned in pale blue and white enamel, decorated in gold and jewels and surmounted with the symbol of Denmark's Order of the Elephant to mark the 40th Anniversary of Maria's father's accession to the Danish throne. The egg was sent to Denmark and presented to Maria there, in Copenhagen, where she was passing the Easter holidays that year. It is not known if the Dowager left the egg in Denmark, or if it returned to Russia with her. This egg has not been seen since 1903, and is considered to be missing, presumed lost. A single, good photograph of the egg in Fabergé's workshop is all that remains as proof it exists.

1888: Cherub with Chariot egg

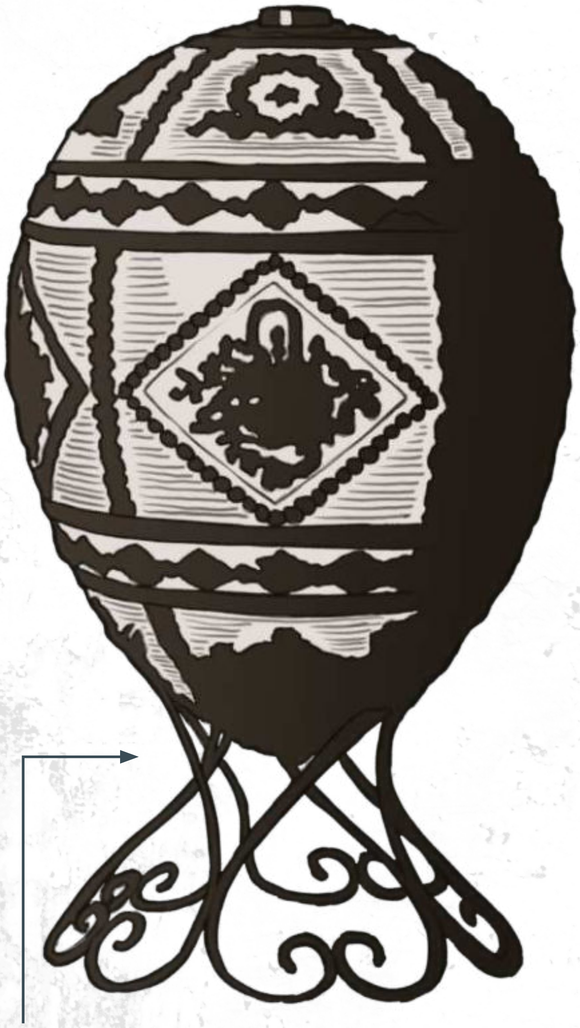
This creation is a small, silver egg placed in a silver 'chariot' with a silver Cupid figure set between the shafts. There is one known semi-photograph of this egg; a tantalising glimpse of the missing object reflected in the glass of a vitrine at a Saint Petersburg exposition in 1902. It almost certainly was sold to Armand Hammer in the 1930s, and was sold on to a Mrs Ethel Gunton Douglas in New York in 1934. The egg was sold by Mrs Douglas's estate through an auction house in 1941 to an unknown buyer as part of a lot of two silver items for the sum of $22.50.





1889: Necessaire egg

This egg – of gold, diamonds, rubies, emeralds and a single cabochon sapphire – contained a 13-piece manicure set. It can be traced from Gatchina Palace, where it fell into Soviet hands, to the Sovnarkom salesrooms sometime after 1922, where it was apparently sold into private ownership. In 1949, the egg appeared in a Fabergé display at Wartski's in London, courtesy of this anonymous owner. The object was identified as Fabergé's work, but not recognised as the missing 1889 egg. In 1952, Wartski bought this egg – still unidentified – from its anonymous owner and sold it on to another buyer who wished to remain unnamed. Wartski honoured this wish, and the new owner's name was not entered into the sales ledger. This egg has not been knowingly seen since this 1952 sale.



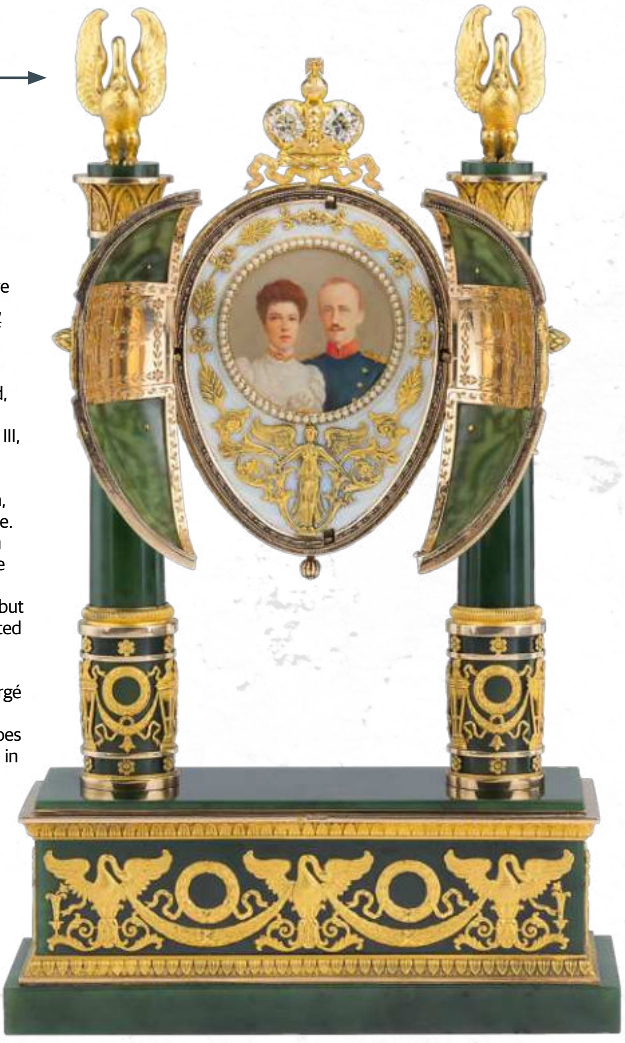
1909: Alexander III Commemorative egg

This egg was created from platinum, gold, white matte enamel, rose-cut and portrait diamonds and contained, as its surprise, a small gold bust of Alexander III, set on a lapis lazuli pedestal. There is a single known photograph of this egg, taken in the Fabergé workshop, though there is no known photograph of the surprise. This egg has not been seen publicly since before the 1917 Revolution, and neither it nor its surprise has been located on any inventory list.

FOUND?

1902: Empire Nephrite egg

Even less is known about this egg than there is about the Mauve egg. It is thought to have been made in the Empire Style, and to have been composed of gold, diamonds, nephrite and either ivory or mother of pearl. The surprise is also unidentified, though it seems possible that a miniature portrait of Alexander III, framed in nephrite, and in the possession of the Dowager's daughter, Grand Duchess Xenia, in the 1950s is a good candidate. A sensational 2004 publication suggests that the egg may have been found and is now in a private collection in New York, but although the claim was supported and its presentation edited by Fabergé expert Alexander von Solodkoff, the majority of Fabergé scholars remain unconvinced. However, the purported egg does match a description discovered in 2015, from an inventory drawn up by the Empress's staff in 1917 of her personal items stored at Gatchina Palace. This list mentions an egg "in gold mount on two columns from nephrite" containing miniature portraits of the Empress's daughter Grand Duchess Olga and the Grand Duchess's first husband, Prince Peter of Oldenburg.



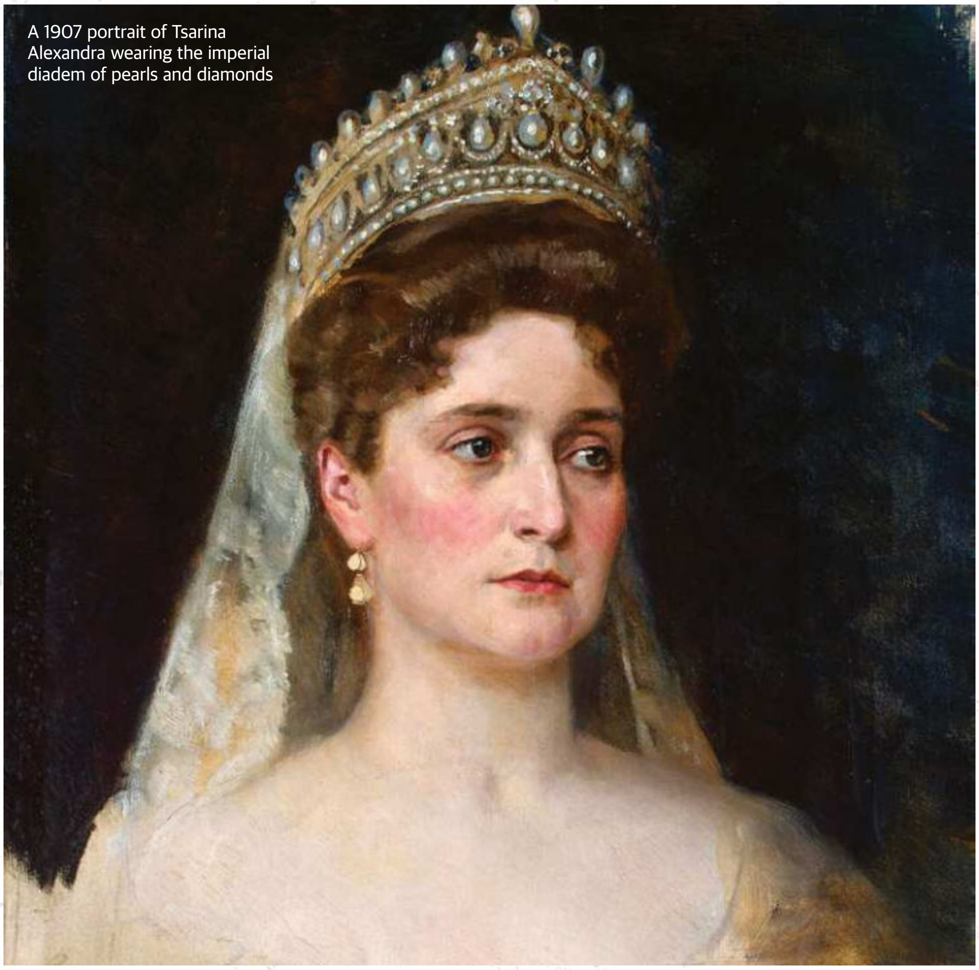
© Rebekka Hearl (illustrations); Wiki Commons, David Katz the Great. The diamonds were set in double rows on red velvet, surrounded with smaller brilliants and surmounted by a cross that was made from six large stones. The crown is of uncertain craftsmanship, but is believed to have been made in the early 1840s by Nichols and Plinkle, a St Petersburg jeweller and holder of a Royal Warrant. The tradition of this crown is that every imperial bride wore it, whether marrying into or out of the House of Romanov. It was bought at the Christie's auction by Marjorie Merriweather Post, and it can be seen today at Hillwood, the former Post estate and now a museum, in Washington, DC.

The Diamond Fund was a treasure trove that fell into the hands of the communist government almost as an afterthought in 1926. But in the immediate aftermath of the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917, the collections of treasure most vulnerable to Bolshevik looting were those of the extended imperial family, who left huge numbers of valuable items behind them in their palaces as they ran for their lives. Several members of the family were not resident in St Petersburg during the October Revolution, and among these was Nicholas's mother, the Dowager Empress Maria, who had been living in a palace in Kiev when it became obvious that she could not return to her homes in and around St Petersburg, the Anichkov and Gatchina Palaces. All of her property inside these palaces was seized by the Petrograd Soviets and photographed and inventoried.

> "All of Maria's property in these palaces was seized by the Soviets"

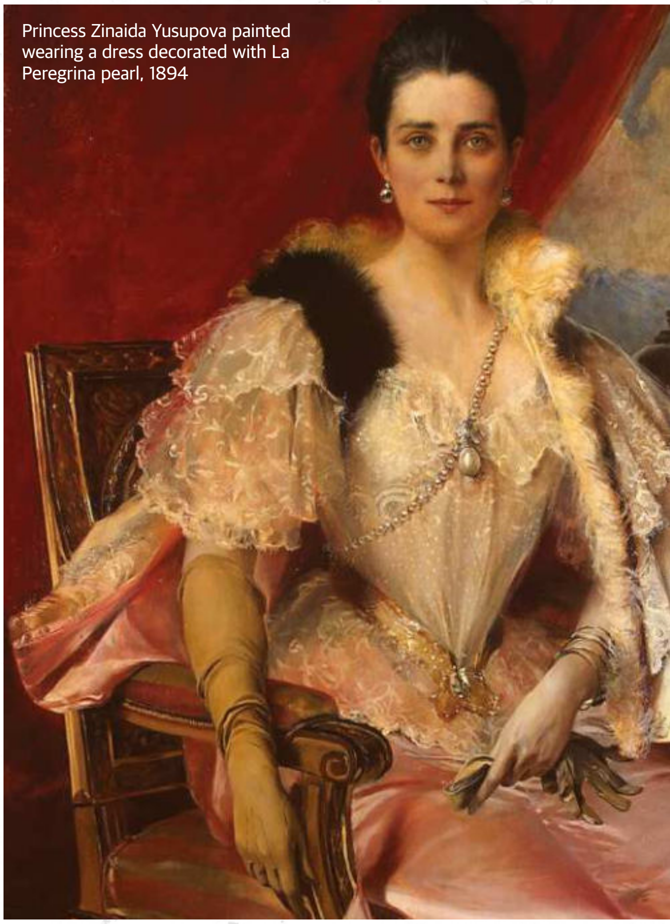
Empress Maria herself left Russia from the Crimea in 1919 aboard a British warship, the HMS Marlborough. A sister of the British Queen Alexandra, Maria spent the rest of her life at home in Denmark, or visiting Alexandra in England. When she died in Copenhagen in 1928, Maria left a final collection of personal treasure in a jewellery box that she kept next to her bed. This box was brought to London, where its contents were appraised by the jeweller Hennells at the amount of £155,000 (in modern currency about £9 million or $11 million) before being returned to the empress's two daughters, Grand Duchesses Xenia and Olga. At this time, Britain's Queen Mary bought only four items from the grand duchesses, and - contrary to rumour - she paid fair market value. Over time, the queen added more items to her collection, but she always paid appropriate amounts to Xenia and Olga.

Empress Marie's granddaughter - and Nicholas's only niece - Princess Irina of Russia, was married to the wealthiest noble in Russia, Prince Felix Yusupov. Following the October Revolution, the intrepid Prince made a foolhardy

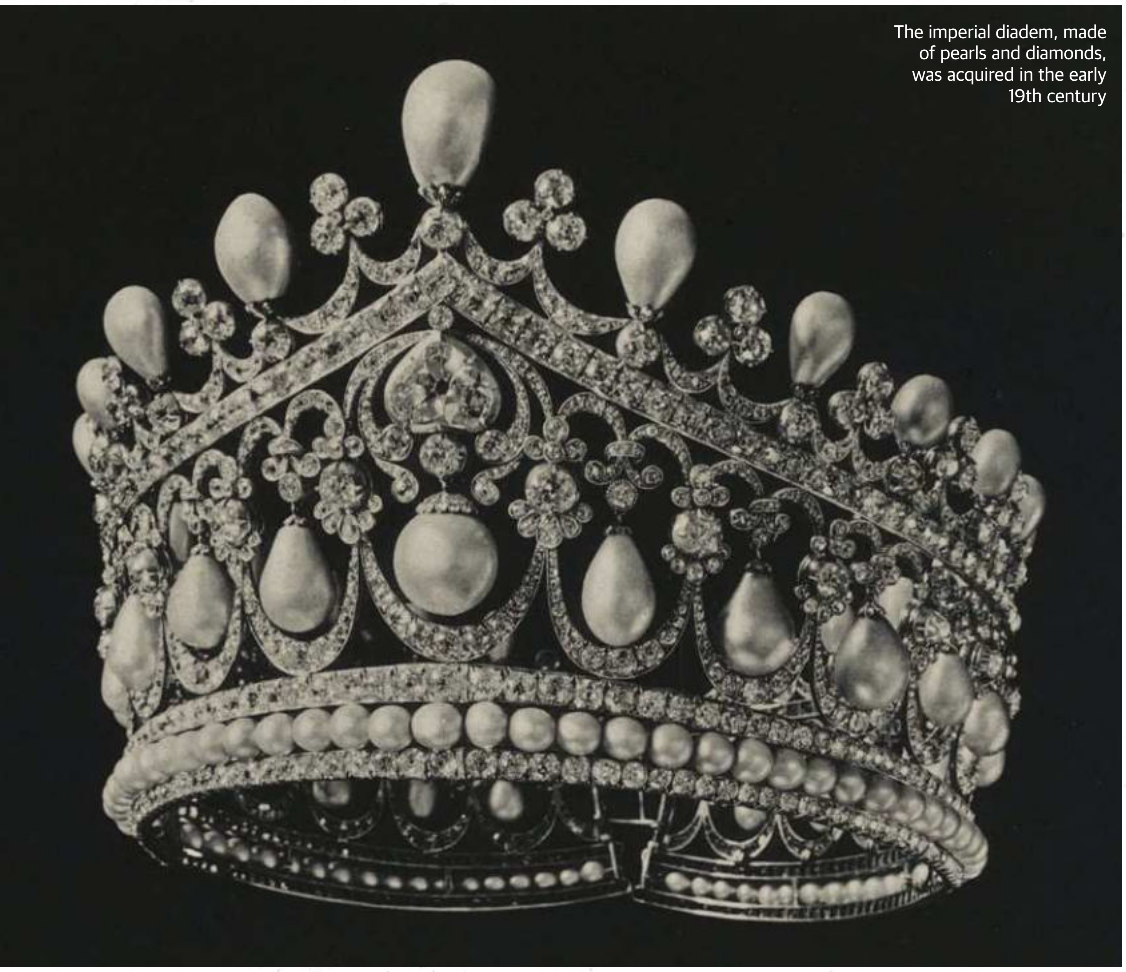


A 1907 portrait of Tsarina Alexandra wearing the imperial diadem of pearls and diamonds

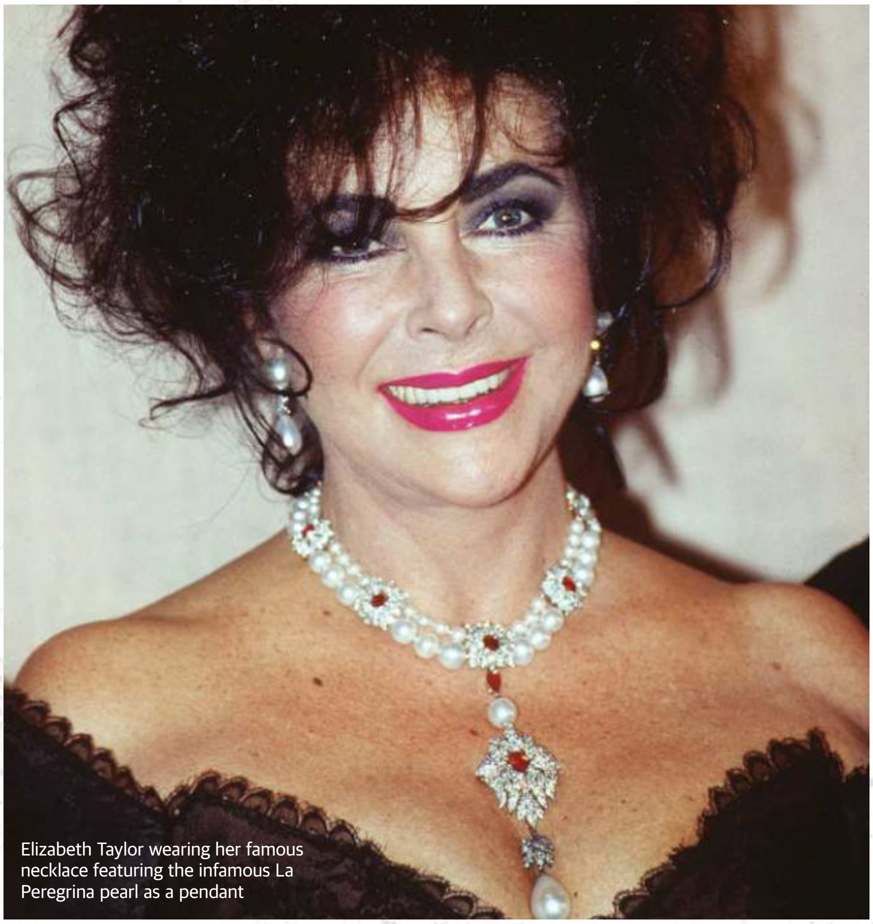
La Peregrina pearl as a pendant on a ruby, diamond and pearl necklace by Cartier. The necklace was owned by Elizabeth Taylor



Princess Zinaida Yusupova painted wearing a dress decorated with La Peregrina pearl, 1894



The imperial diadem, made of pearls and diamonds, was acquired in the early 19th century



Elizabeth Taylor wearing her famous necklace featuring the infamous La Peregrina pearl as a pendant

raid on his own house, the Yusupov Palace on the Moika Canal in St Petersburg, and managed to escape with two Rembrandts that he had cut out of their frames, and pockets stuffed full of loose gems and smaller pieces of jewellery. Felix's mother, Princess Zenaida, escaped Russia with many of her jewels, including the 133 grain pearl known as La Peregrina. Following Zenaida's death in 1939, La Peregrina was sold to a Geneva jeweller. From there, the pearl was purchased by the actor Richard Burton and given to his wife Elizabeth Taylor. Taylor had La Peregrina set as a drop in a pearl-and-ruby necklace by Cartier. This necklace, and La Peregrina, is believed to remain in Taylor's estate.

The palaces and bank vaults of other imperial family relatives were seized as quickly as could be accomplished and inventories were made by the Bolsheviks, who saw the valuables within as a source of cash that could then be used to launch the new Soviet government's plan of industrialisation. But Soviet Russia was not without those who chose to benefit personally from the seizure of Romanov wealth. Lenin himself requisitioned one of the former emperor's automobiles, a lavish Delaunay-Belleville limousine, in which he had himself driven around St Petersburg. This act of looting must have happened very shortly after the October Revolution and was soon surpassed by a more audacious act of robbery when one day Lenin was car-jacked on the streets of the city and found himself having to walk back to the Duma building. Thereafter, he confined himself to a more common Rolls-Royce limo.

The requisitioned and inventoried treasure was eventually organised for sale by the Soviets in salesrooms set up in Moscow, where interested foreigners were encouraged to purchase the art of a fallen imperial culture. The salesrooms were forbidden to Russians, and only hard-currency sales were permitted. Many pieces were bought by American businessman Armand Hammer, who kept some pieces for his own art collection, but who also made many more pieces available for purchase through department stores in New York City. This became a valuable source of income for the nascent Soviet government, and via this route, a number of pieces of Romanov treasure disappeared into the households and private collections of unknown and – at this distance of time – probably unidentifiable individuals. Armand Hammer is today one of the best-known 20th-century collectors of Russian art.

Another well-known collector of Russian art was Marjorie Merriweather Post. The heiress of the Post Cereal fortune, Post was married to an American diplomat called Joseph E Davis, who was the United States ambassador to the Soviet Union for 18 months from 1936 to 1938. During her time in Moscow, she was invited to visit the Soviet salesrooms. They had largely all been picked clean by the time she made her first visit, but she still managed to find several stunning pieces, as well as large amounts of tarnished silver and pewter – which she was able to buy by weight, bring home and polish up. All of these items, together with her purchases from the 1927 Christie's sale in London, can be visited today at Hillwood.

If Hammer and Post were in the first generation of collectors of requisitioned imperial and Romanov jewellery and art, then Malcolm Forbes may be said to be in the forefront of the second generation, together with several institutions such as the Virginia Museum of Fine Art. Malcolm Forbes built an impressive collection of former imperial possessions, including nine Fabergé eggs that had been created for the empresses Marie and Alexandra. In 2004, 13 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, events began to come full circle as the Russian industrialist Viktor Vekselberg began buying collections of imperial art - including the Forbes Collection - and returning them to Russia. This repatriation of Russian cultural pieces is admirable, but can never really be complete, given that many of the pieces have been sold and re-sold the length and breadth of the world, and many have been lost or forgotten in the meantime.

In July 1918, the Red guards selected as the execution squad for the Romanovs had the unnerving experience of seeing their carefully aimed bullets literally bounce off the torsos of the young grand duchesses, who screamed as they ran back and forth across the basement murder room. After their first attempts failed, the guards retreated to the outside corridor to regroup and to discuss what on Earth - or from Heaven - was happening with what should have been a straightforward execution by shooting. Nicholas, Alexandra, the family doctor and two servants had been dispatched of relatively cleanly, but the five children and the maid seemed impervious to their lead.

Fortifying themselves with alcohol - and some no doubt secretly resorting to prayer - the executioners entered the room armed with bayonets and revolvers. This time, there was no reprieve, and soon all 11 members of the last Romanov household lay dead or dying on the floor.

Then, as the guards moved around the room, positioning the bodies to be stretchered out to the waiting stake-bed pick-up truck that would carry the deceased family to their gravesites, they noticed gashes and slashes in the clothing of the young women. Gleaming through these holes, they could see the brightly coloured precious stones, pearls and gold of the remaining Romanov treasure.

Undoubtedly intended to finance a brand-new life in another country - or to buy their way out of treacherous peril - the valuable jewels had been sewn into the corsets and undergarments of the grand duchesses and Alexei and had served as makeshift bullet-proof vests, an unexpected side-effect and a literal demonstration of the jewels' ability to protect the lives of the young Romanov children.

Some 17 pounds in weight of jewellery - loose stones, necklaces, gold wire, bracelets and earrings - were recovered and returned

Making millions

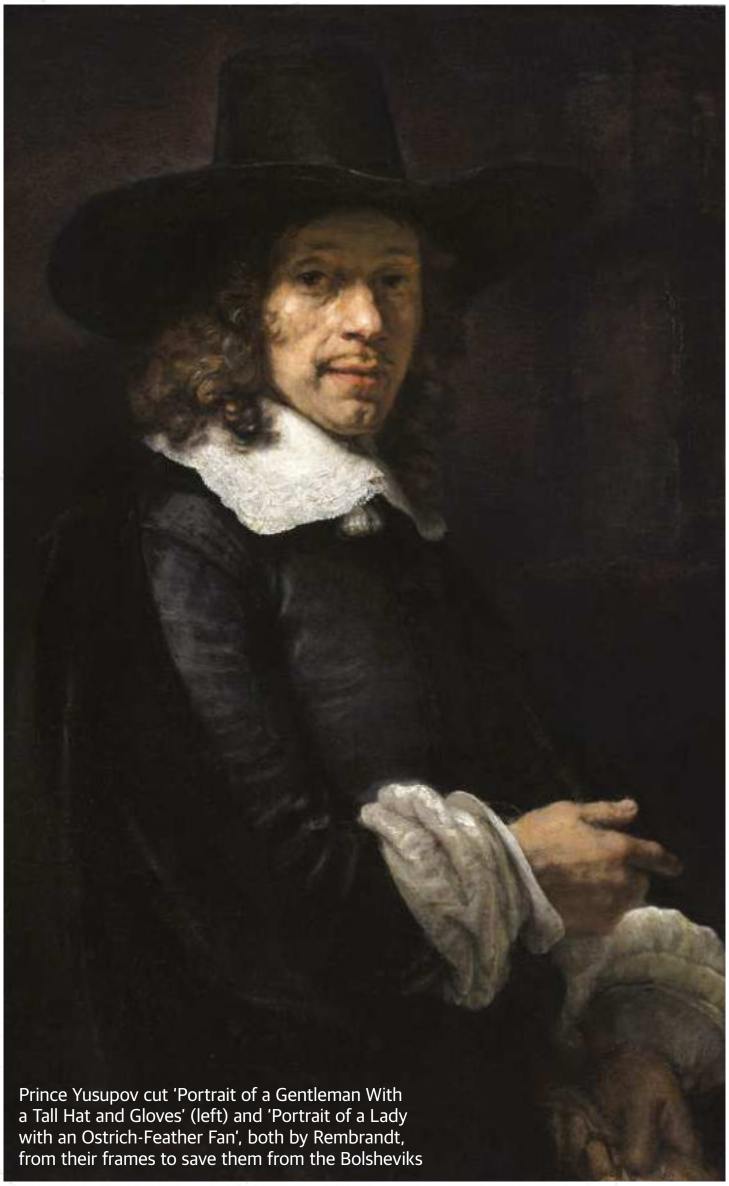
After the costly years of WWI and the Russian Civil War, Russia was in bad shape and its population had been depleted of landowners, business owners and its traditional leadership, the nobility. Lenin knew he would have to rebuild the country literally from the ground up, and so his government determined that one course of action would be to sell looted valuables and use the cash proceeds to purchase tractors and other farming equipment. But by the time the party had completed a study of their loot, separating out what would be kept back and cataloguing that which would be offered for sale, the art market had hit a worldwide slump and the Soviets found out that their valuables would not sell for the amount they wanted.

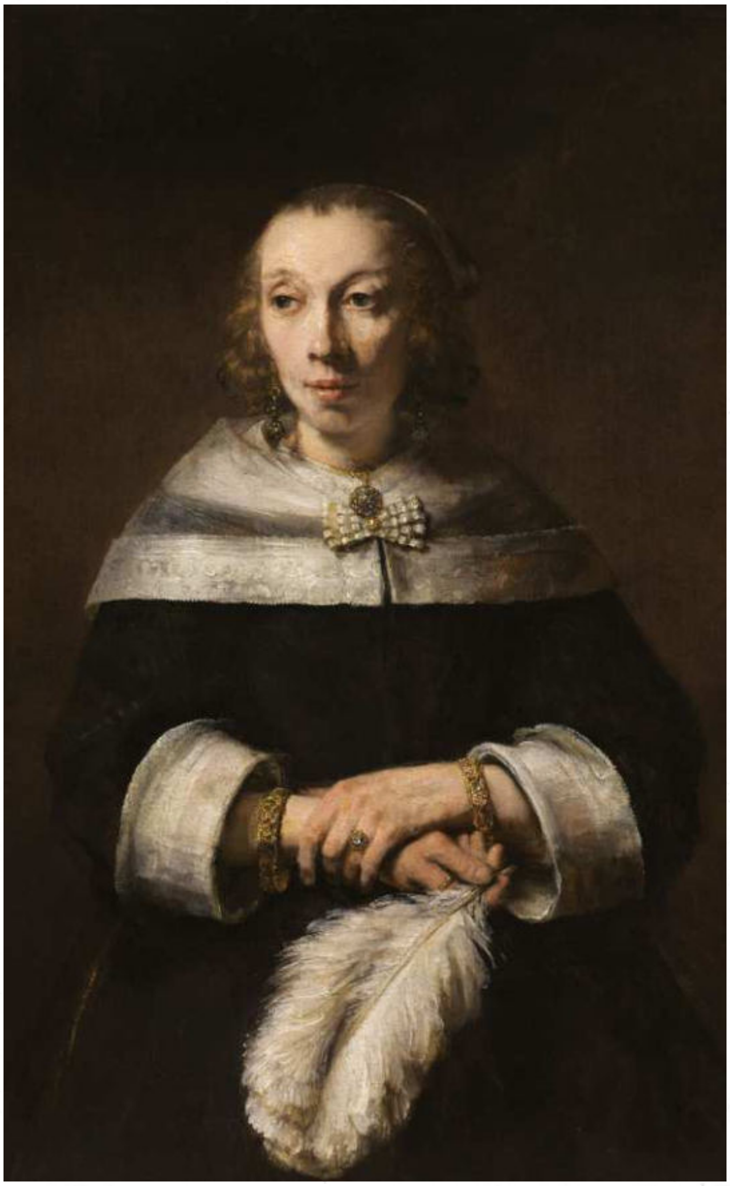
An article in the Atlanta Constitution from 24 July 1929 reported on a delegation of American businessmen and wealthy collectors unofficially visiting Russia to purchase art and jewellery. The story ran, "Although members of the group purchased many thousands of dollars worth of paintings and other art objects from the Soviet Government, they came to one place where even American wealth was powerless." What the Americans were unable to buy was a selection of the Russian Diamond Fund, the least expensive piece of which was for sale for $1 million, and the 190-carat Orloff Diamond, which the article stated the Soviets wanted "to convert into plough shares, locomotives and tractors."

Several sales did take place, however, with Western financiers like Andrew Mellon, the US secretary of the treasury from 1921 to 1932. While publicly supporting trade sanctions and embargoes between the US and the Soviet Union, Mellon saw no issue with purchasing no fewer than 25 masterpieces from the Hermitage Museum, offered by the Soviets in a private sale.

If the Soviets found a buyer in Mellon but not an ally in international politics, in others, such as American capitalist Armand Hammer, they found someone willing to assist in facilitating sales in the US. Hammer was a valuable conduit of imperial and Diamond Fund items from Russia to the showrooms of various department stores in New York City. The services rendered by individuals like Hammer, and sales of larger items to the extremely wealthy, combined with a few sales that happened at Christie's and Sotheby's, brought some revenue to the Soviets, but the Diamond Fund sales and sales of other valuables in the 1920s and 1930s were not major sources of income, and the 'plough shares for tractors' plan was ultimately a failure. There was little financial value gained, and so the sales made no real economic sense

In the end, considering that in the first years of power Lenin brokered a deal with the British government that allowed him to buy some of the most advanced airplane engines of the time from the Rolls Royce company, it would be appropriate to ask just how cash-strapped the Soviets were. Money raised through loot sales is not estimated to have been much more than a drop in the bucket. Lenin, however, knew how to make a deal, and as a sweetener, Rolls Royce offered a 15 percent discount on one of their automobiles - which Lenin happily snapped up.





Prince Yusupov cut 'Portrait of a Gentleman With a Tall Hat and Gloves' (left) and 'Portrait of a Lady with an Ostrich-Feather Fan', both by Rembrandt, from their frames to save them from the Bolsheviks

"The valuable jewels had been sewn into the corsets and undergarments of the grand duchesses and Alexei, serving as makeshift bullet-proof vests"

to Moscow by the local Soviet. These jewels represented but a fraction of the total jewellery and valuables the imperial family took into exile. As the Romanovs were kept in confinement in the Governor's House in Tobolsk, they could not help but be aware that their wellbeing was at the centre of several probably nefarious plans to extract money and wealth from the supply line that radiated out from friends in Moscow and St Petersburg to the family in Siberia. In order to safeguard the majority of their remaining fortune, 197 items of extreme literal and historical value were smuggled out of the Governor's House, carried by faithful friends and retainers and distributed among the Romanov faithful in the townsfolk.

In 1933, Stalin turned his attention to the lost Romanov valuables, and he sent the NKVD (successors of the tsarist Cheka and precursors of the KGB) to conduct an investigation among Tobolsk's townspeople and the former members of the Romanov household there, some of whom had not left Russia, and who were living all across the country. The investigation was a short and brutal one in which several people, including one of the imperial children's teachers, Klaudia Bittner Kobylinsky, were arrested and shot in retaliation for loyalty to the dead Romanovs. In the end, 154 of the hidden items of jewellery and jeweller's art were recovered from the various hiding places inside walls and wells, and were exhumed from backyard holes. These items were returned by the NKVD agents to Moscow, where a few were delegated to remain in the Kremlin Armoury, but many were directed to the Soviet salesrooms and to where they were sold in order to raise money for the state.

There is no doubt that Soviet policy sacrificed Russia's cultural and artistic heritage in order to finance its planned industrialisation; but the extent of this policy may be illustrated in one final anecdote. In 1891, the 21-year-old Grand Duchess Alexandra Georgievna, born a princess of Greece and married to the Russian Grand Duke Paul Alexandrovich, died in childbirth. The greatly beloved young woman was buried in accordance with imperial tradition in the Peter and Paul Fortress. In 1939, the king of Greece, Alexandra's nephew, approached the Soviet Government for permission to repatriate his aunt's body in accordance with her mother's last wishes. Stalin agreed that the exhumation and repatriation could only take place, allegedly, in exchange for a certain number of tractors.

Images: Alamy, Mary Evans, Shutterstock

Series four brings fictional New York mob boss Luca Changretta (Adrien Brody) to Birmingham in search of vengeance

1925-1926

SERIES FOUR

82 **THE GENERAL STRIKE OF 1926**
Workers in Tommy's factory walk out on strike in series four, reflecting the real-life protest that brought the country to a near standstill for nine days

88 **JESSIE EDEN**
A determined activist, Jessie played a major role in fighting for workers' rights, but how does her portrayal in the show compare to reality?

90 **PROHIBITION AND THE MOB**
The Peaky Blinders find themselves targeted by the ruthless New York mafia. Discover how the mob thrived during the Prohibition era

Image: Alamy

SERIES FOUR

THE GENERAL STRIKE OF 1926

Post-WWI Britain was experiencing rising tensions and falling wages among its mining communities, which escalated to a national standstill

Words Tanita Matthews

WORKERS UNION
FIGHT
AND
THE WORKERS' UNION
JOIN UP
PAY UP
HOLD YOUR HEAD UP

An estimated 1.7 million workers walked out during the General Strike of 1926, and many more people were affected by the disruption it caused

For nine days, between 4 and 12 May 1926, more than 2 million industrial workers across the country laid down their tools and relinquished their roles, bringing the country to a grinding halt. Some did so in protest while others walked out in solidarity. Their aim? To take a stand against the declining conditions their government had agreed to on behalf of coal miners, which meant that their already menial and depleted income would be further reduced, and the laboriously long hours they traded for that income extended. Their strike would become the biggest industrial dispute in British history. By the time of the General Strike of 1926, only several years had passed since Armistice Day marked the end of the First World War, but this monumental event was a major catalyst to what became a nationwide rebellion.

A LUMP OF COAL

As the First World War came to a close, the coal industry in Great Britain had already begun to suffer. High demands for coal had led to a depletion of reserves and, once the war was over, falling exports and mass unemployment led to difficulties across the mining industry. This dire situation was further impacted by the failure of British mine owners to embrace the essential modernisation of the industry. While countries such as Germany and Poland were mechanising their pits to increase efficiency, Britain - with its out-of-date technology and machinery - was falling far behind the rest of Europe and thus the coal industry was on the verge of becoming irrelevant in the market.

On 15 April 1921, miners declared a strike over wages and working hours. They had also called upon their alliances within the transport and railway workers, but their plea was snubbed. This resulted in a breakdown within the Triple Alliance, which had been formed between the three unions several years earlier with the promise of solidarity - the idea was that each union would strike in sympathy with the others should the situation arise.

In 1924, Germany was allowed to re-enter the international coal market on the condition they would export free coal to some Allied nations, including France and Italy. This was part of the reparations Germany was obliged to make, as agreed in the Treaty of Versailles. However, frustrations between Germany and France grew increasingly fraught due to their trade-off of steel and coal and in 1924, the Dawes Plan was drawn up to rectify the situation.

YOUNG COMMUNIST LEAGUE
E. LONDON BRANCH
WORKERS OF THE WORLD UNITE
SUDDEN RISE IN UNEMPLOYED! DUCHESS of YORK GAVE BIRTH TO A DAUGHTER
WESTMINSTER CITY LABOUR PARTY

The Dawes Plan was a strategy to stabilise the German economy and relieve some of the burdens of wartime reparations, so that it could re-align itself into the international coal market. It further impacted Britain's falling coal prices, with negative consequences on the domestic market. As a result, the price of coal in Europe fell drastically, which was terrible news for mine owners. By the mid 1920s, about 60 per cent of British coal was being produced at a loss.

In 1924, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin began serving his second term after the Conservatives' victory in the general election. The following year, his chancellor of the exchequer, Winston Churchill, re-introduced the Gold Standard, causing the inflation of the value of the British pound. This decreased its value to such an extent that it became too strong for effective exporting to take place, so interest rates were raised. By the mid 1920s, coal production in the country was at its lowest, while prices were simultaneously falling. The market was in freefall.

Aside from the international politics of coal, conditions for miners were deteriorating rapidly. Not only was the job dangerous – often resulting in serious injury or death (and with little in the way of compensation for the families whose livelihoods were affected by such tragic events) – but the mining industry had been handed back into the hands of private owners and de-nationalised after the end of the war. This allowed mine owners to cut pay and increase hours, with no repercussions. In a time of economic instability, mine owners were determined to hold onto profits, resulting in the decision on 30 June 1925 to lower wages for their miners. In seven

Fact vs fiction

Series four of *Peaky Blinders* begins on the cusp of 1926, the year of the General Strike. Tommy Shelby meets Jessie Eden (Charlie Murphy), who works in his factory and threatens to lead his workers on a strike if he doesn't agree to provide equal pay for women. In May 1926, the real-life Jessie led female factory workers out on strike in solidarity with the country's coal miners. The strike affected the entire nation as protestors spent nine days locked out of their workplaces and the country came to a near standstill.

Leading figures from both sides of the strike: AJ Cook (left), general secretary of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain; Walter Citrine (right), general secretary of the Trades Union Congress; and Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin (centre)

years, miners' pay had been decreased from £6 per day to a measly £3.90, further increasing mass poverty among thousands of families.

When the mine owners announced their intentions to reduce wages further, they were met with fury by the president of the Miners' Federation of Great Britain, Herbert Smith, and the indignant cries of its members. The Trades Union Congress (TUC) offered its support to the miners' union, and raised the prospect of strike action.

Mining had been thrown into crisis and a Royal Commission was set up. Established under the chairmanship of Sir Herbert Samuel, its purpose was to investigate the root cause and provide a solution to the problems in the mining industry.

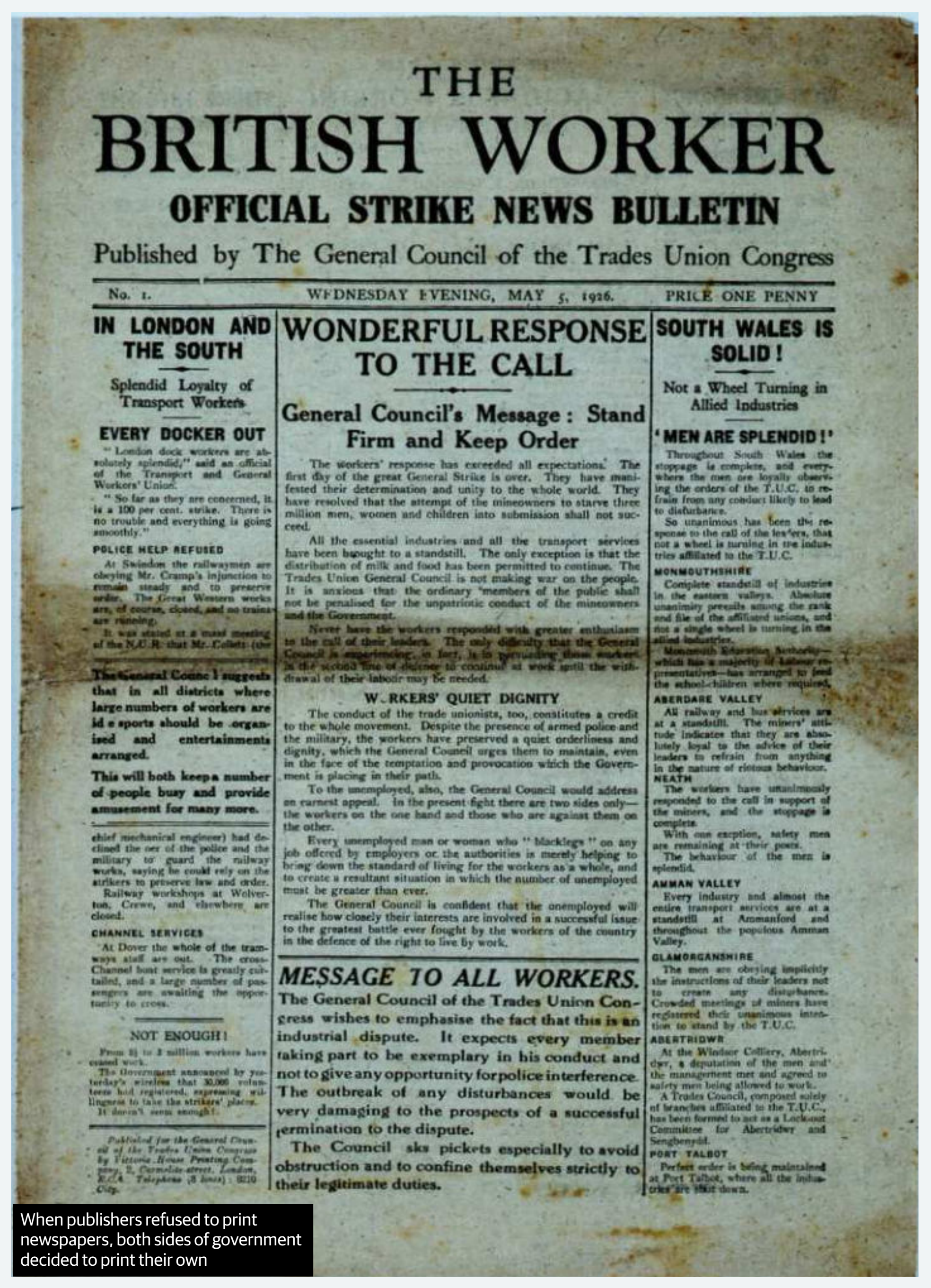
In March 1926, the report was published, along with its recommendations. Some of these included the reorganisation of the mining industry with the view of making necessary improvements if applicable. It also included the nationalisation of royalties and the withdrawal of a subsidiary that the Tory government had put in place months earlier. However, the most dramatic recommendation, which would have far-reaching implications, was to reduce miner's wages by 13.5 per cent and increase the working day from seven to eight hours. Smith told a meeting with representatives of the colliery owners: "We are willing to do all we can to help this industry, but it is with this proviso, that when we have worked and given our best, we are going to demand a respectable day's wage for a respectable day's work; and that is not your intention."

The Mining Association responded aggressively and issued new terms of employment, which included the extension of the seven-hour working day to eight, district wage-agreements, and a reduction in the wages of all miners of up to 25 per cent. The mine owners announced that if miners did not accept their new terms of employment, they would be locked out of the pits from 1 May. At the end of April 1926, the owners made good on their word and the miners found themselves locked out.

AN ATTACK ON THE BRITISH CONSTITUTION?

After weeks of discussions, no compromise had been reached. Final negotiations began on 1 May, and the TUC called for a last-ditch meeting, to be held at the Memorial Hall in Farringdon Street, London. A negotiation committee had been established and all who attended were invited to defend the miners and their rights.

Ernest Bevin, the General Secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union (TGWU) implored all at the meeting to "fight for the soul of labour and salvation of the miners" with the recommendation that "no person in the first grade [printing, iron and steel, heavy chemicals, building, electricity and gas, railway, road transport and docks] must go to work at starting time on Tuesday morning, that is to say if a settlement has not been found". But by 5pm, after a failure to reach a decision, it was announced that a general strike was to begin on



THE

BRITISH WORKER

OFFICIAL STRIKE NEWS BULLETIN

Published by The General Council of the Trades Union Congress

No. 1. WEDNESDAY EVENING, MAY 5, 1926. PRICE ONE PENNY

IN LONDON AND THE SOUTH

Splendid Loyalty of Transport Workers

EVERY DOCKER OUT

"London dock workers are absolutely splendid," said an official of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

"So far as they are concerned, it is a 100 per cent. strike. There is no trouble and everything is going smoothly."

POLICE HELP REFUSED

At Swindon the railwaymen are obeying Mr. Cramp's injunction to remain steady and to preserve order. The Great Western works are, of course, closed, and no trains are running.

It was stated at a mass meeting of the N.U.R. that Mr. Collett (the chief mechanical engineer) had declined the offer of the police and the military to guard the railway works, saying he could rely on the strikers to preserve law and order.

Railway workshops at Wolverton, Crewe, and elsewhere are closed.

The General Council suggests that in all districts where large numbers of workers are idle sports should be organised and entertainments arranged.

This will both keep a number of people busy and provide amusement for many more.

CHANNEL SERVICES

At Dover the whole of the tramways staff are out. The cross-Channel boat service is greatly curtailed, and a large number of passengers are awaiting the opportunity to cross.

NOT ENOUGH!

From 2½ to 3 million workers have ceased work.

The Government announced by yesterday's wireless that 30,000 volunteers had registered, expressing willingness to take the strikers' places.

It doesn't seem enough!

Published for the General Council of the Trades Union Congress by Victoria House Printing Company, 2, Carmelite-street, London, E.C.4. Telephone (8 lines): 8210 City.

WONDERFUL RESPONSE TO THE CALL

General Council's Message: Stand Firm and Keep Order

The workers' response has exceeded all expectations. The first day of the great General Strike is over. They have manifested their determination and unity to the whole world. They have resolved that the attempt of the mineowners to starve three million men, women and children into submission shall not succeed.

All the essential industries and all the transport services have been brought to a standstill. The only exception is that the distribution of milk and food has been permitted to continue. The Trades Union General Council is not making war on the people. It is anxious that the ordinary members of the public shall not be penalised for the unpatriotic conduct of the mineowners and the Government.

Never have the workers responded with greater enthusiasm to the call of their leaders. The only difficulty that the General Council is experiencing, in fact, is in persuading those workers in the second line of defence to continue at work until the withdrawal of their labour may be needed.

WORKERS' QUIET DIGNITY

The conduct of the trade unionists, too, constitutes a credit to the whole movement. Despite the presence of armed police and the military, the workers have preserved a quiet orderliness and dignity, which the General Council urges them to maintain, even in the face of the temptation and provocation which the Government is placing in their path.

To the unemployed, also, the General Council would address an earnest appeal. In the present fight there are two sides only—the workers on the one hand and those who are against them on the other.

Every unemployed man or woman who "blacklegs" on any job offered by employers or the authorities is merely helping to bring down the standard of living for the workers as a whole, and to create a resultant situation in which the number of unemployed must be greater than ever.

The General Council is confident that the unemployed will realise how closely their interests are involved in a successful issue to the greatest battle ever fought by the workers of the country in the defence of the right to live by work.

MESSAGE TO ALL WORKERS.

The General Council of the Trades Union Congress wishes to emphasise the fact that this is an industrial dispute. It expects every member taking part to be exemplary in his conduct and not to give any opportunity for police interference. The outbreak of any disturbances would be very damaging to the prospects of a successful termination to the dispute.

The Council asks pickets especially to avoid obstruction and to confine themselves strictly to their legitimate duties.

SOUTH WALES IS SOLID!

Not a Wheel Turning in Allied Industries

'MEN ARE SPLENDID!'

Throughout South Wales the stoppage is complete, and everywhere the men are loyally observing the orders of the T.U.C. to refrain from any conduct likely to lead to disturbance.

So unanimous has been the response to the call of the leaders, that not a wheel is turning in the industries affiliated to the T.U.C.

MONMOUTHSHIRE

Complete standstill of industries in the eastern valleys. Absolute unanimity prevails among the rank and file of the affiliated unions, and not a single wheel is turning in the allied industries.

Monmouth Education Authority—which has a majority of Labour representatives—has arranged to feed the school-children where required.

ABERDARE VALLEY

All railway and bus services are at a standstill. The miners' attitude indicates that they are absolutely loyal to the advice of their leaders to refrain from anything in the nature of riotous behaviour.

NEATH

The workers have unanimously responded to the call in support of the miners, and the stoppage is complete.

With one exception, safety men are remaining at their posts.

The behaviour of the men is splendid.

AMMAN VALLEY

Every industry and almost the entire transport services are at a standstill at Ammanford and throughout the populous Amman Valley.

GLAMORGANSHIRE

The men are obeying implicitly the instructions of their leaders not to create any disturbance. Crowded meetings of miners have registered their unanimous intention to stand by the T.U.C.

ABERTRIDWR

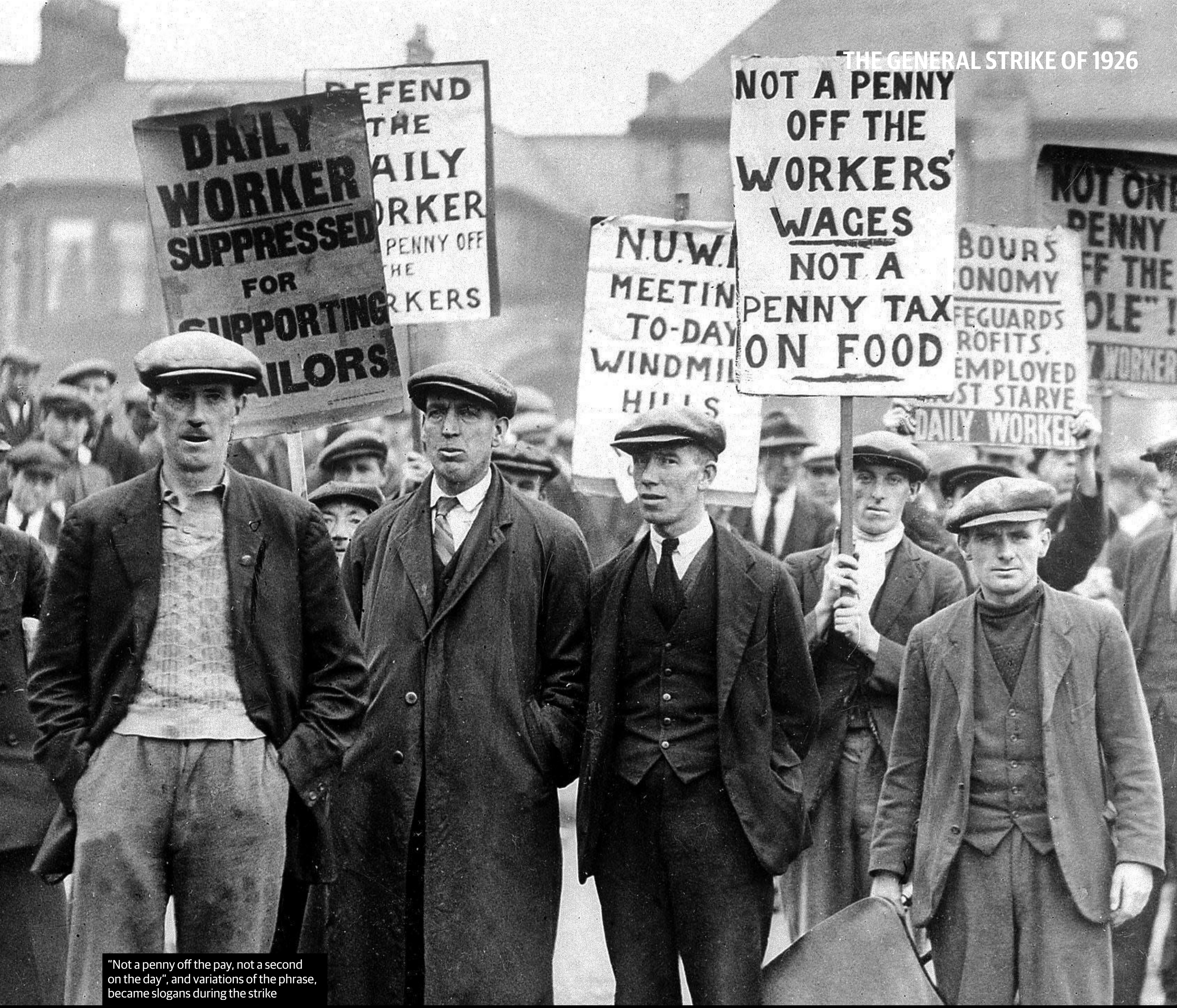
At the Windsor Colliery, Abertridwr, a deputation of the men and the management met and agreed to safety men being allowed to work.

A Trades Council, composed solely of branches affiliated to the T.U.C., has been formed to act as a Lock-out Committee for Abertridwr and Senghenydd.

PORT TALBOT

Perfect order is being maintained at Port Talbot, where all the industries are shut down.

When publishers refused to print newspapers, both sides of government decided to print their own


DAILY WORKER SUPPRESSED FOR SUPPORTING SAILORS
DEFEND THE DAILY WORKER
PENNY OFF THE WORKERS
N.U.W. MEETING TO-DAY WINDMILL HILLS
NOT A PENNY OFF THE WORKERS' WAGES NOT A PENNY TAX ON FOOD
ECONOMY SAFEGUARDS PROFITS UNEMPLOYED MUST STARVE DAILY WORKER
NOT ONE PENNY OFF THE "DOLE"!

"Not a penny off the pay, not a second on the day", and variations of the phrase, became slogans during the strike

"As many as 800,000 coal miners downed tools and 1.55 million workers from non-mining unions joined in solidarity"

the week commencing 3 May, at one minute to midnight. Over the next two days, frantic efforts were made to reach an agreement between the government and the mining industry representatives. However, they failed, mainly because of a decision by printers of national newspaper the *Daily Mail* to down tools at the eleventh hour. They refused to print an article condemning the general strike and walked out.

Embarrassed, the TUC negotiators apologised to Baldwin for the printers' behaviour, but the prime minister refused to continue with the talks. Instead, a letter addressed to the TUC negotiators stated that the "gross interference with the freedom of the press" involved a "challenge to the constitutional rights and freedom of the nation". The TUC had promised that services and distributions such as sanitation, food and milk would be unaffected.

On 3 May the strike began. Arthur Pugh, the chairman of the TUC, was put in charge of the strike. As many as 800,000 coal miners downed tools and 1.55 million workers from non-mining unions joined them in solidarity.

Britain had experienced strikes before, but in a post-war nation the number of citizens taking a stand had increased dramatically. Since 1918 women in Britain had been given the right to vote, and so, during the 1926 strike, both men and women alike were up in arms. People were becoming more willing to protest against policies that directly affected them and their families, and were learning how powerful their voices could be as a force for change.

One notable figure from the strike was Jessie Eden, a communist activist and factory worker. She encouraged solidarity between the male and female workers as she invited the women at Lucas Electronics factory in Birmingham where she worked to stand up and be counted. She was also a union steward for the factory's only section of unionised women. During the strike, she convinced these same unionised female workers to walk out of the factory and join the strike in solidarity with the miners.

What started off as a relatively peaceful strike turned ugly over the course of nine days. On the first day, Monday 3 May, public transport ground to a halt along with the printing press. Many of

Crowds of volunteers queuing outside the Foreign Office to sign up as strike workers. Not all citizens agreed that striking was the best course of action

those who weren't striking found themselves unable to get to work, and in many industries and institutions those who did manage to make it in were sent home due to the lack of staff. The only news service available to the public was on BBC radio, because the printers were on strike.

The Conservative government assumed responsibility for the press that was being churned out during the strike. The prime minister appealed to people to trust him. In the first of a series of radio broadcasts to the nation, he implored them to trust in him and his government: "I am a man of peace. I am longing, and looking and praying for peace. But I will not surrender the safety and the security of the British constitution." Several other politicians supporting the government's disapproval of the strike appeared on BBC radio, but none defending the strikers were given the opportunity to speak.

The next day, both sides of the opposition published the first edition of their own newspapers, taking the role of the press into their own hands. Churchill commandeered the offices and presses of right-wing newspaper *The Morning Post* in order to edit and produce *The British Gazette*. In the first issue, he condemned the strike and declared that its purpose was for the strikers to overturn the constitution. Representing the other side of the dispute, *The British Worker* became the voice of the strikers. The paper insisted that the strike was only an industrial dispute and in no way was an attempt to undermine or attack the constitution.

> "Bus windows were bricked in as they passed by angry protestors, frustrated with the lack of support from their fellow citizens"

With many working-class staff off duty, volunteers were roped in to keep the nation afloat. Jobs undertaken by volunteers included porters at train stations, public transport drivers and newspaper deliveries. All the while, there was a continued concern about widespread violence and rioting. Tensions were at boiling point and it felt as though such unpleasantries could erupt at any moment.

The armed forces were quickly deployed by the government to escort and protect food lorries, which had become unable to transport goods as promised. By Thursday, some of the trains on the London Underground ran, but were manned mostly by middle-class volunteers. As many as 1,700 trains ran that day, along with 80 buses, most of which were vandalised and damaged.

Volunteers stepped up to keep public transport running smoothly, but their efforts were often disrupted. Within the first few days of the strike, 47 London buses were damaged by the baying crowds

There were disturbances in Edinburgh, Leeds, Aberdeen and in various parts of London. While volunteers got some buses back on the roads and trains on the rails, the risk to their safety was very real as pandemonium began to erupt on the streets. Volunteers were pulled from their vehicles and beaten; bus windows were bricked in as they passed by angry protestors, frustrated with the lack of support from their fellow citizens; fights broke out between police and strikers in major cities across the UK, including London, Liverpool, Middlesbrough, Preston, Hull and Glasgow.

In response, the government recruited a militia of 226,000 special constables to form the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies. In Newcastle, protestors derailed the Flying Scotsman express train in Northumberland.

Images: Alamy, Getty

A convoy of food trucks being escorted by the military. Food distribution was disrupted by the strike, so the government set up a makeshift distribution centre in Hyde Park

This prompted Whitehall to dispatch a naval warship and led to the arrest of 374 communists.

The government attempted to rally support claiming that TUC was attempting to starve the country, and that there had been widespread intimidation. In London alone, 50,000 special constables were to be hired to maintain order.

DOWN THE SHAFT

Desperate to bring the General Strike to an end, the general secretary of the TUC, Walter Citrine, attempted to negotiate with the government. But Baldwin refused to strike a deal while the strike was ongoing. Citrine reached out to the general secretary of the National Union of Railwaymen and Sir Herbert Samuel (who had chaired the Royal Commission earlier that year).

Without telling the miners, the TUC negotiating committee met Samuel on 7 May, where they sat together and drafted a set of proposals to end the strike. The terms overall amounted to a reduction in wages, the very thing that the miners and their allies had protested against. The TUC accepted the terms, but the Miners Federation was furious that the TUC had entered in an agreement behind the miners' backs.

As the seventh day of the General Strike came to a close, there was still some violent disturbance across the UK. One of the areas most affected by this was Glasgow, where, over the course of the strike, the police had made an estimated 300-400 arrests relating to strikers.

On the eighth day of the strike, 11 May, at a meeting of the TUC General Committee, the committee decided to accept the terms proposed by Samuel and agreed to call off the General Strike. At midday on 12 May, a TUC representative walked through the doors of Downing Street to announce the strike was being called off. The prime minister refused the conditions and instead proposed that if miners returned to work on the current conditions, he would provide a subsidiary for the next six weeks. Hereafter, there would be the pay cuts that the mine owners' association had suggested. However, Baldwin did agree to legislate for the amalgamation of pits, introduce a welfare levy on profits and introduce a national wages board.

The TUC agreed. By 12 May, 1926, most of the nation's workforce began to trickle back to work. The decision was bitterly disappointing for the coal miners and their supporters, as they had been unable to negotiate guarantees of fair treatment for the miners.

Unionists looked upon Citrine as a traitor for agreeing to the conditions and for going behind their backs to negotiate. However, his reasoning for giving in came from leaked information suggesting that Churchill was looking to introduce two devastating pieces of legislation. It was rumoured that he planned to stop all trade union funds and then outlaw sympathy strikes. The outcome would mean that future strikes would be compromised, because the unions wouldn't be able to use their funds to pay strikers.

Coal miners trickled back to work, working for less money and longer hours. However, many fought on to the bitter end until November, but were so poverty-stricken they were effectively starved back into work. Some suffered more misfortune as they found themselves unemployed and unable to find work for years after the strike had ended. In June, the government approved a bill that allowed mine owners to introduce an eight-hour working day. The mine owners used these extended hours to reduce the need for labour while maintaining productivity.

A lasting legacy of the strike came in the form of the 1927 Trade Disputes Act, which banned sympathy strikes as well as mass picketing. The ban is still in force today – while it was repealed in 1946, in the 1980s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher reintroduced it, and it remains unchanged today.

What is the TUC?

The Trade Union Congress was formed in 1868 in Sheffield, Yorkshire. Initially called The United Kingdom Alliance of Organised Trades, it became regarded as an umbrella organisation of Britain's trade unions. Although it is the sole national trade union, three other related bodies also exist: the Scottish Trades Union Congress, the Wales Trade Union Council, and the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (including a Northern Ireland Committee). The committee was built up to be the 'parliament of labour' and it ensured that trade unions could be supported and their members represented.

The very first TUC meeting was held in 1868 when the Manchester and Salford Trades Council convened the founding meeting in the Manchester Mechanics' Institute. Since 1871 it had a permanent standing committee, otherwise known as 'the Parliamentary Committee', whose principal function was to lobby parliament for legislation favourable to unions.

After the First World War, the TUC assumed a more modern form, replacing its Parliamentary Committee with a General Council. The council acquired powers to deal with inter-union conflicts and to intervene in disputes with employers.

TUC

Changing the world of work for good

Now a 21st-century staple committee for trade unions, the TUC currently has 48 affiliated unions, and a total of about 5.5 million members

SERIES FOUR

THE REAL JESSIE EDEN

Meet the trailblazing feminist who fought for social justice and equality

Words Jessica Leggett

Jessie Eden was born on 24 February 1902, at 61 Talbot Street in Winson Green, Birmingham. She was the eldest daughter of William and Jessie Shrimpton. Jessie's mother – who was only 17 years old at the time of her birth – was a campaigner for women's suffrage, which may have influenced Jessie's activism as an adult. She married Albert Eden in Kings Norton in 1923, and they adopted a son, Douglas, together. Their marriage, however, did not last long and they divorced, with Jessie later admitting that they held different political views.

Jessie got a job filling shock absorbers at the Joseph Lucas motor components factory, where she was soon appointed as the shop steward for the Transport and General Workers Union. When the 1926 General Strike – a huge working-class protest – hit Birmingham, it was Jessie who persuaded the factory's unionised female workers to join the strike. In an interview for the *Birmingham Post* to mark the strike's 50th anniversary in 1976, Jessie recalled, "One policeman put his hands on my arm. They were telling me to go home, but the crowd howled… 'Hey, leave her alone' … and some men came and pushed the policemen away. They didn't do anything after that. I think they could see that there would have been a riot."

Jessie's activism did not end there. In 1931, she noticed that the management of her factory was watching her because they wanted to implement an American-style system, where pay would be scaled to production output. Jessie was an efficient worker and so the management wanted to use her as a benchmark for the other women. The women at the factory were outraged by this, especially as they were

Jessie Eden is an overlooked figure in British history

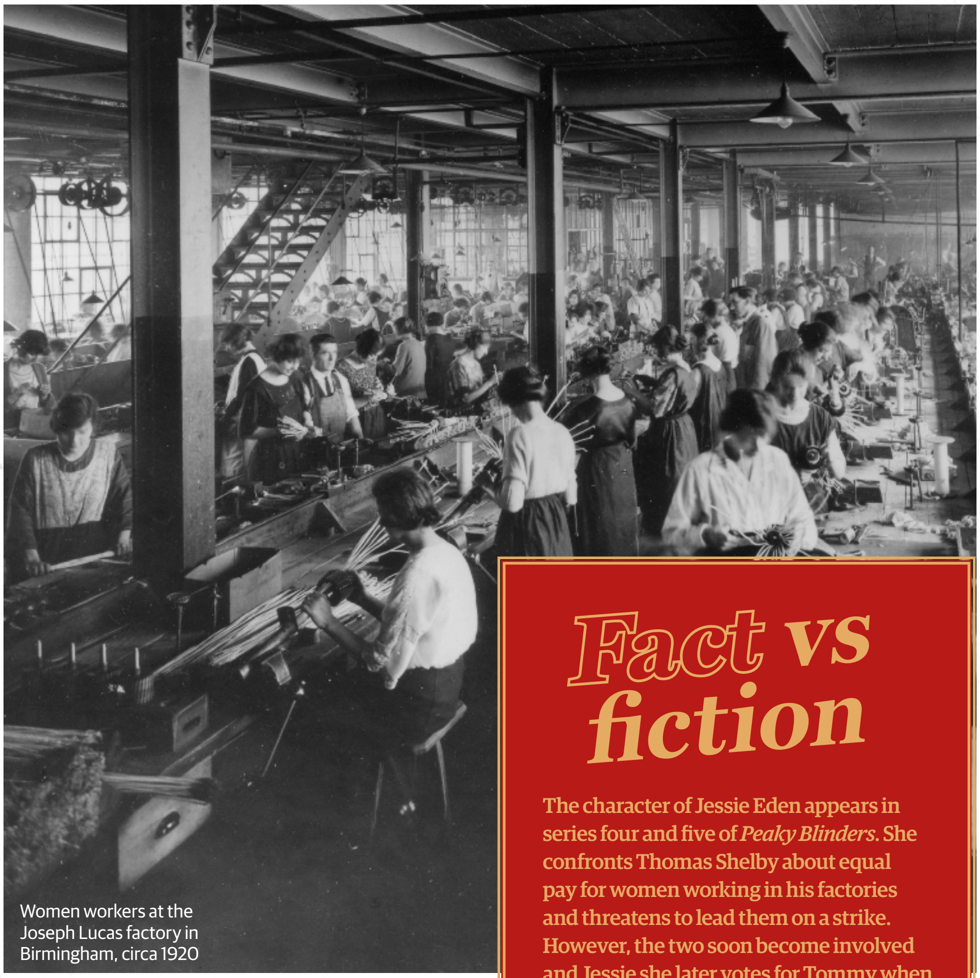
The fictional version of Jessie Eden in the show, as portrayed by Charlie Murphy

already having their toilet breaks timed, and Jessie led 10,000 non-unionised women as they walked out of work for an entire week.

It was an unprecedented moment for women to strike, especially on such a large scale, and the factory management agreed to drop the plan to scale pay. The strike was successful and it brought female workers one step closer to mass unionisation. Nonetheless, Jessie was singled out for organising it and she eventually lost her job. Although she struggled to find work in the aftermath, she did receive a victimisation payment from the Transport and General Workers Unions, and a gold medal from its leader, Ernest Bevin, for her efforts in leading the strike.

Jessie had joined the British Communist Party during the factory strike, and she was sent by the party to Moscow to rally the female workers who were building the Metro in the city. She remained in the Soviet Union for over two years but made little progress with the women due to the language barrier. Jessie later revealed to her daughter-in-law that she was not allowed to tell anybody where she had gone. In 1935, Jessie was elected to the Central Committee of the Communist Party.

> “The strike was successful and it brought female workers one step closer to mass unionisation. But Jessie was singled out for organising it and lost her job”


Women workers at the Joseph Lucas factory in Birmingham, circa 1920

Meanwhile, working-class families across the country were living in slum-like conditions by the late 1930s. The disgruntled went on strike, refusing to pay their rent until the living conditions in their homes were improved. By now, Jessie was vice-president of the Central Tenants Association and she led the rental strikes in Birmingham in 1939, which saw 90 per cent of the city's tenants refuse to pay their rent. The strike lasted ten weeks and almost 50,000 people marched in protest. It was yet another historic event in which Jessie was a key figure.

Attempting a move into politics, Jessie stood for the Communist Party in Handsworth in the general election in August 1945 – even though she lost, she still secured 3.4 per cent of the vote. In 1948, she married her second husband, fellow communist Walter McCulloch, and they adopted a child together two years later.

Jessie's political and social activism continued into her later years, and in 1969, she led a march in Birmingham with Walter to protest the Vietnam War. She died in 1986, at the age of 84, nine years after her husband. She was a feminist hero who was a champion of the working class and a tireless fighter for justice and equality, and she played an important role in British trade union history.

Fact vs fiction

The character of Jessie Eden appears in series four and five of *Peaky Blinders*. She confronts Thomas Shelby about equal pay for women working in his factories and threatens to lead them on a strike. However, the two soon become involved and Jessie she later votes for Tommy when he stands as an MP for Birmingham, only to discover that he was using her to gain information on the communists.

While this portrayal of Jessie in the show is entirely fictional, *Peaky Blinders* has drawn some much-deserved attention to this real-life fascinating woman who has largely been forgotten in history.

Images: Alamy, Getty, Kevin Mcgivern (illustration)

Arguably the most famous gangster of them all, Al Capone ran an underworld empire in the city of Chicago during Prohibition

Fact vs fiction

Series four sees the Shelby family unit fractured – until New York-Sicilian mafioso, Luca Changretta, serves every member a Black Hand, symbolising a death threat. This new enemy reunites the Romani clan, who forge an unlikely alliance with Al Capone, based on the real-life Chicago mob boss. During the Prohibition era, Capone became one of the most notorious mob bosses, who grew immensely powerful through his bootlegging business. Though the Prohibition didn't occur in the United Kingdom, in the show, the Peaky Blinders start illegally manufacturing alcohol to supply their mobster allies in the US.

SERIES FOUR

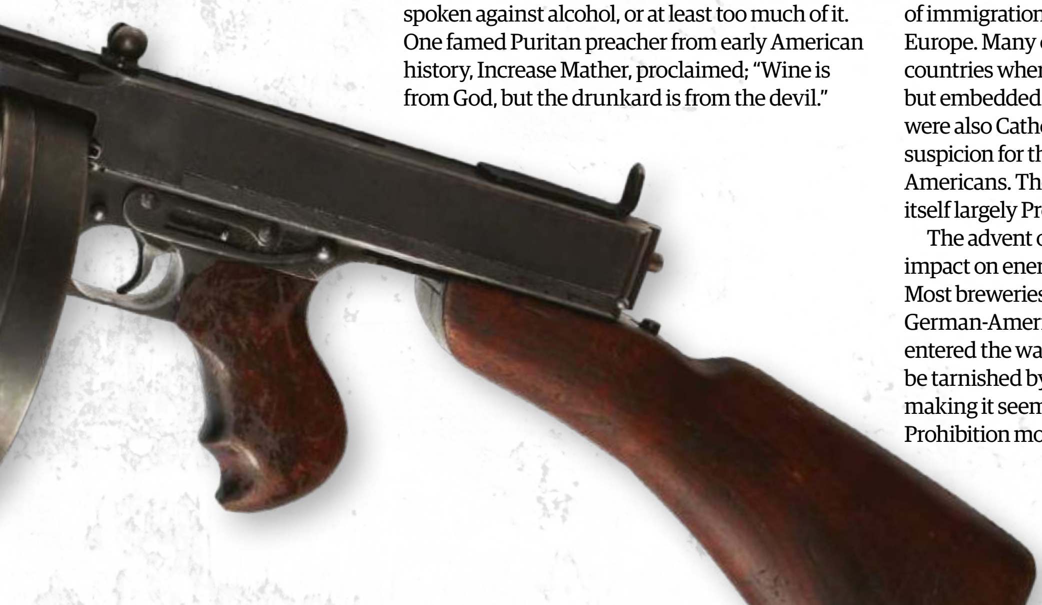
PROHIBITION AND THE MOB

Prohibition provided extraordinary opportunities for American gangsters to profit from the illegal bootlegging trade in banned alcohol and empowered the criminal organisation known as 'the mob'

Words Marc Desantis

Prohibition played a crucial role in the rise of the American gangster. There were certainly gangsters in America before Prohibition, and there would be gangsters after it was repealed. But the banning of alcohol gave underworld criminals a lucrative product to sell that many were willing to pay a high price for and break the law to get.

That alcoholic beverages could be banned in America must at first glance seem surprising, even shocking. Americans had a long history of alcohol consumption and had enthusiastically produced their own spirits, such as rum and whiskey. But for a long time there had been voices who had spoken against alcohol, or at least too much of it. One famed Puritan preacher from early American history, Increase Mather, proclaimed; "Wine is from God, but the drunkard is from the devil."



Social factors also gave impetus to the drive for reform. In the late 19th century, the United States had been transformed into an industrial, urban nation. Millions of Americans had migrated from their farms to the cities to find work in factories. The introduction of rural America to the often unwholesome conditions of city life was an uneasy one. Many Americans fresh from the country blamed urban ills on alcohol.

Another disquieting aspect of the cities to the minds of rural folk was the presence of many millions of 'alien' immigrants from non-English-speaking nations. The late 19th and early 20th centuries were the heyday of immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe. Many of these immigrants came from countries where alcohol was not only drunk, but embedded in the national culture. Many were also Catholic and this was a source of suspicion for the more established Protestant Americans. The temperance movement was itself largely Protestant in its support.

The advent of World War I also had a powerful impact on energising the move for Prohibition. Most breweries in the country were owned by German-Americans. Once the United States entered the war against Germany, alcohol could be tarnished by its association with the enemy, making it seem unpatriotic. Politically, the Prohibition movement gained strength in the early 20th century, with the Anti-Saloon League exemplifying its growing power and confidence. A Prohibition constitutional amendment bill was brought before the US Senate for a vote in July 1917. It was approved, and the House of Representatives did the same in December. For it to become enacted law, it would have to be ratified by at least three-quarters of the then 48 states. In just 13 months, 36 states had ratified the proposal, which went into effect as the 18th Amendment in 1920.

Prohibition's advocates had won the long battle fought against massive odds over many decades. The 18th Amendment would bear bitter fruit, however. A terrible menace, one worse than the problems caused by the consumption of alcohol, would soon arise, fuelled by the insatiable thirst for the liquor that, even though now illicit, Prohibition could never dispel – the mob.

When liquor had been made illegal, organised criminal gangs stepped in to provide Americans with what they wanted, for a hefty price. The cost to America of this flourishing of organised crime was not merely money. The sheer amount of cash to be made through illegal means was so great that gangs would fight pitched battles over the right to supply liquor.

American cities became the domains of gun-toting, bootlegging gangsters, all striving and killing and dying because they had a product that could not be legislated out of existence. In acknowledgement of the utter failure of Prohibition, in 1933 the 18th Amendment was repealed, 13 years after it had gone into effect, by another amendment, the 21st. By then, however, the damage had been well and truly done. Prohibition meant that the mob had become a force far larger and more powerful than what it had been before.

Arguably the most famous of all Prohibition-era mobsters was Al Capone. He was not alone or even the first in his criminal activities, and he initially had a patron under whom he learned much about the world of organised crime. Capone got his start as an underling in Chicago running brothels on behalf of Johnny Torrio. Torrio had moved to Chicago from New York and had craftily bought up breweries that had been put out of business by Prohibition. Hard liquor was smuggled from Canada. These banned substances became part of the attraction of the gambling parlours, bordellos and speakeasies – illegal bars that served alcohol – that Torrio controlled. Since these were all illicit enterprises, protection was bought by paying generous bribes to politicians, judges and police officers.

However, the direst threat to Torrio, who had his crime empire in Chicago's south, came from other gangsters. Just as modern corporations compete for market share, so too did Chicago's gangsters for the underworld business. This was often bloodily violent.

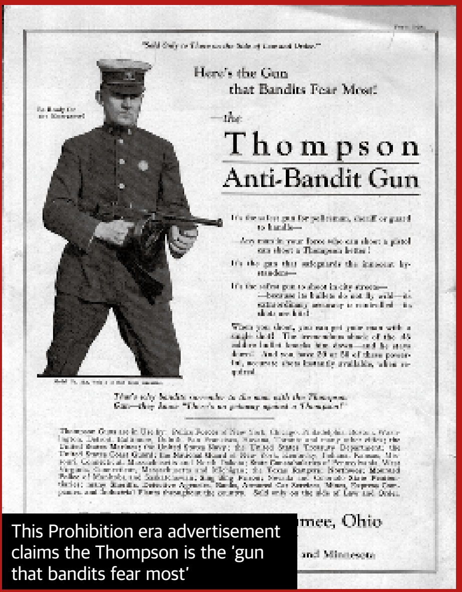
Torrio was 17 years Capone's senior, and quite unlike his brutal young acolyte. He was quiet and exuded a mild aura. He may not have been vicious like Capone, but he was no angel either. He certainly employed other men to do his dirty work when necessary. One major hit authorised by Torrio was the murder of another gangster,

The Tommy gun

The Thompson submachine gun had its origins in the need for a firearm well-suited for trench fighting. After the US had entered World War I, the full-sized, bolt-action Springfield rifle, otherwise an excellent weapon, was found to be less-than-ideal for close combat. The US Army desired something handier for its troops, with a high rate of fire that could sweep clear an enemy trench.

General John T Thompson came up with the fast-firing submachine gun in response. It spat a chunky .45 ACP cartridge packing an enormous punch that could reliably knock a man down, a big benefit in combat. Dubbed the Thompson submachine gun, it was not ready until 1919, after the war had ended.

The 'Tommy gun', as it was nicknamed, gained notoriety as the signature weapon of the American gangster during the Prohibition years.



Here's the Gun that Bandits Fear Most!

—the Thompson Anti-Bandit Gun

This Prohibition era advertisement claims the Thompson is the 'gun that bandits fear most'

The Chicago gangsters who used it in their gun battles became known as 'Tommy men.' The Thompson was also called the 'Chicago Piano' due to its association with the mob. It figured prominently in the infamous 1929 St Valentine's Day Massacre. From a mob gunman's point of view, the Tommy gun was close to perfection. Its high rate of fire – 700 rounds per minute – meant it could lay down a curtain of lead. Often, gangsters armed with Thompsons outgunned the police.

As a consequence of its underworld popularity and its appearance in cinematic portrayals of gangsters, the weapon became wedded in the minds of many Americans with organised crime and gangland shootouts. However, during World War II, the Thompson was used to equip US troops and was also supplied in huge numbers to numerous Allied armed forces. The soldiers battling Axis tyranny greatly appreciated the Thompson's remarkable stopping power.

17535
38771
27446
31299
24205

The Purple Gang of Detroit was notoriously violent and known for hijacking other gangs' shipments of bootleg liquor

> "Just as modern corporations compete for market share, so too did Chicago's gangsters for the underworld business. This was often violent"

Dean O'Banion. O'Banion's North Side Gang had been hijacking Torrio's alcohol shipments and also had a hand in getting Torrio arrested for an alcohol-related offence. Since this was Torrio's second, he could potentially be sent to prison. Torrio, and another gang that had a grievance against O'Banion, the Terrible Gennas, who ran an illicit industrial alcohol production racket, teamed up to have him killed. On 10 November 1924, a trio of men walked into the flower shop that O'Banion ran. When O'Banion extended his hand in greeting, one of the men gripped it and would not let go. His two companions took out handguns and shot O'Banion dead.

It was Torrio's turn next. Surviving members of the North Side Gang caught up with Torrio three months later and shot him three times. Astonishingly, Torrio survived the assassination attempt, but his days as a gangster were over. He decamped for Italy and handed over the reins of his Chicago outfit to his protégé, Al Capone.

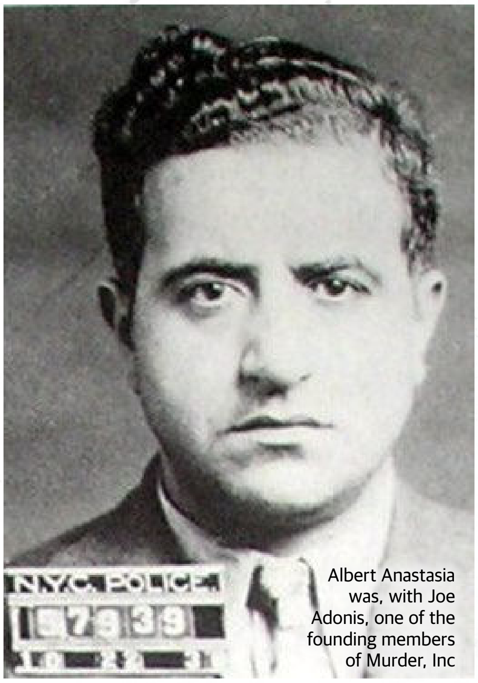
After Al Capone, perhaps the most famous gangster to emerge from the Prohibition era was Charles 'Lucky' Luciano. Born in a poor village in Sicily in 1897, Luciano was brought to America by his mother in 1906, settling in New York City on Manhattan's Lower East Side. He was a school dropout at 14 and was soon involved in small-scale criminal activities, including robberies and muggings. From an early age he was an admirer of the local gangsters he saw around him. "[T]hey were rich," he explained later, "and rich was what counted, because the rich got away with anythin'."

He took up with other young gangsters who would become dark legends in their own right, including Bugsy Siegel, Frank Costello and Meyer Lansky. The enactment of the 18th Amendment would give such ruthless, enterprising criminals unparalleled opportunities to make fortunes. Luciano became a stalwart of the bootlegging business in New York.

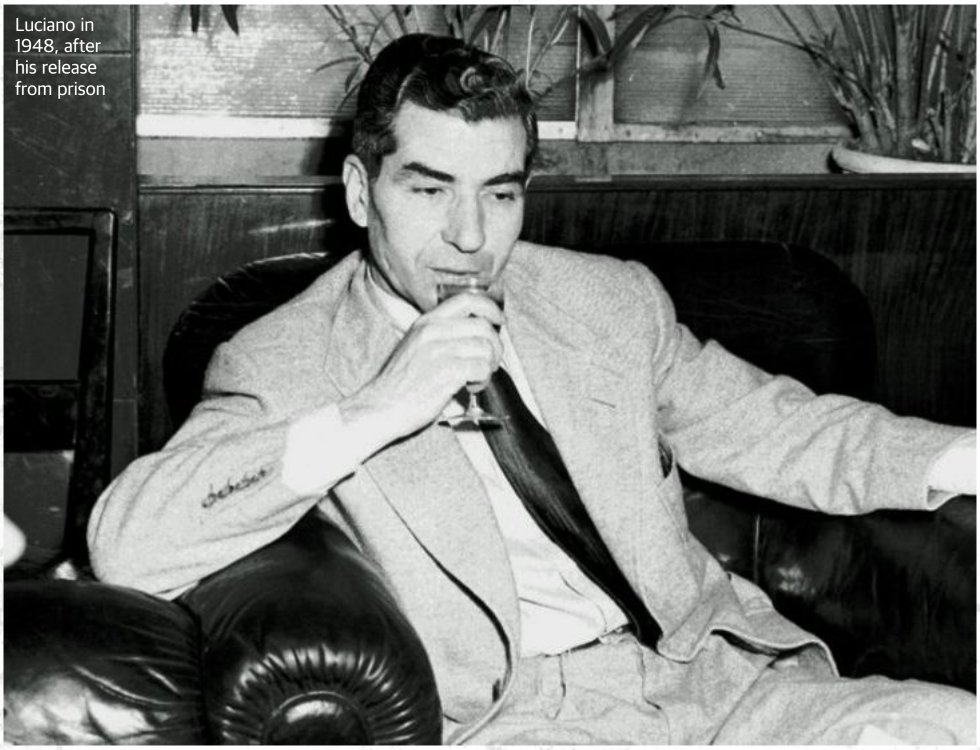
Luciano was very eager to project an image of himself that was markedly different from the older generation of mobsters who were variously called 'Mustache Petes' or 'greaseballs'. He took care to dress well, but not flamboyantly. In his outward appearance he was more akin to a respectable businessman than that of a stereotypical, murderous gangster.

He came to the attention of older mob bosses who were eager to recruit him into their own organisations. In 1927 he joined with Joe 'the Boss' Masseria, serving as his right-hand man. In 1929 he was captured by one of Masseria's bitter enemies, Salvatore Maranzano. Maranzano's men worked over Luciano badly, with Luciano taking serious knife cuts to his face. He was left with a permanent droop to his right eye, but Luciano lived. For his unexpected survival, he was dubbed 'Lucky' by fellow gangster Meyer Lansky.

Luciano was repelled by the wasteful fights between gangs that disrupted the otherwise lucrative business of the criminal underworld. He believed that there was enough for everyone and that crime should be run as if it were a legitimate business; efficiently and with as little friction as possible. The feuds of the older generation of mob bosses, such as Masseria and Maranzano, were not at all to his liking. He had especially disliked what the so-called 'Castellammarese War' had done to the underworld business. To Luciano, and other younger mobsters, the older generation was too hidebound, too set in their ways, and too antiquated in their notions of honour to see which way the business of organised crime was heading. He had a hand in the 1931 murder of his old boss, Masseria, and also in the subsequent killing of Maranzano.



Albert Anastasia was, with Joe Adonis, one of the founding members of Murder, Inc



Luciano in 1948, after his release from prison

'Big Jim' Colosimo was a Chicago underworld boss engaged in gambling and prostitution, he was assassinated in 1920 by Johnny Torrio

Luciano, at the urging of Johnny Torrio, then instituted the Commission in 1931, an umbrella organisation for the mob in which each group, or family, ran its own businesses on their own turf, but the heads of each would meet periodically to manage relations between them. Luciano was adamant that they had to cooperate for the good of all. "I told 'em jealousy was our biggest enemy," said Luciano. "In our kind of business there was so much money to be made that nobody had the right to be jealous of nobody else." In modern business terms, Luciano had organised the criminal syndicates into a cartel that would eliminate needless competition. Luciano was the Commission's first chairman, and the heads of the others families were similar to a corporate board of directors.

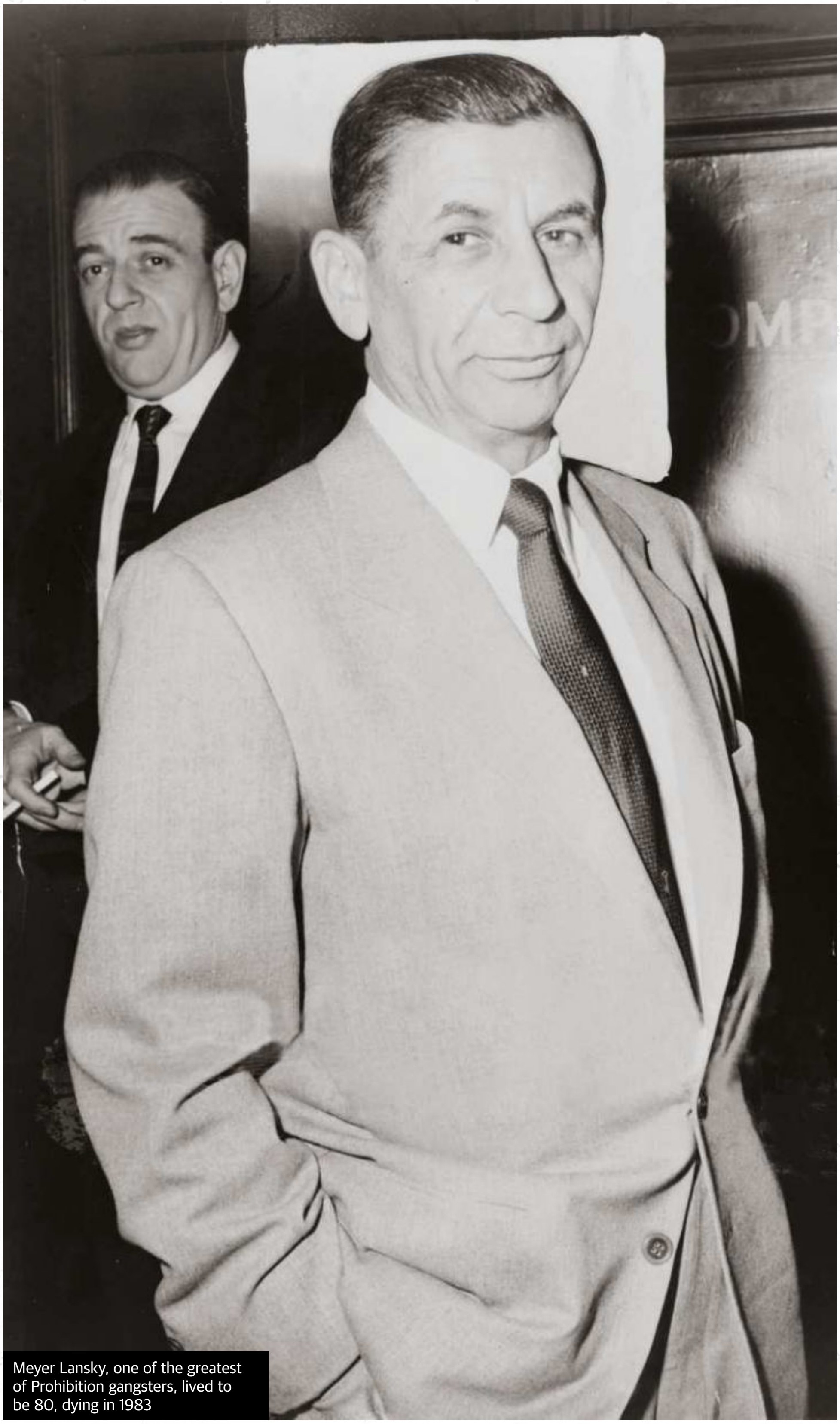
Luciano's considerable luck, like that of so many mobsters, would eventually run out. In 1936 he was convicted on prostitution charges. He had built his empire on prostitution as well as bootlegging, and at his trial there came a stream of women from his operation who testified against him. That June he was given a sentence of 30 years in prison. For a man just shy of 40, it was effectively a life sentence.

Luciano's later years were not as dramatic as those of the Prohibition era, but he did still manage to find himself embroiled in events nonetheless, and always made sure to use it to his advantage. Though still in prison in the early 1940s, Luciano dominated the Longshoreman's Union, which included men who worked at the docks. With American entry into World War II, there was a real fear that German saboteurs would hurt port operations. The US Navy requested Luciano ensure that the docks remained secure. In 1946, on account of his aid, his prison sentence was commuted and he was deported to Italy. Though he tried to remain relevant to the organised criminal underworld from various perches outside the United States, his influence declined and he died in Italy in January 1962.

Twelve-year-old Meyer Lansky became friends with an older youth who would later go on to become better known as 'Lucky' Luciano. Lansky and Luciano became associates in New York's early 20th century criminal underworld. Before that, while still a youth, Lansky formed a gang with another young Jewish gangster, Benjamin 'Bugsy' Siegel, called the Bugs and Meyer Gang. Their specialities were gambling and protection rackets. One of the more famous members of their outfit was Dutch Schultz.

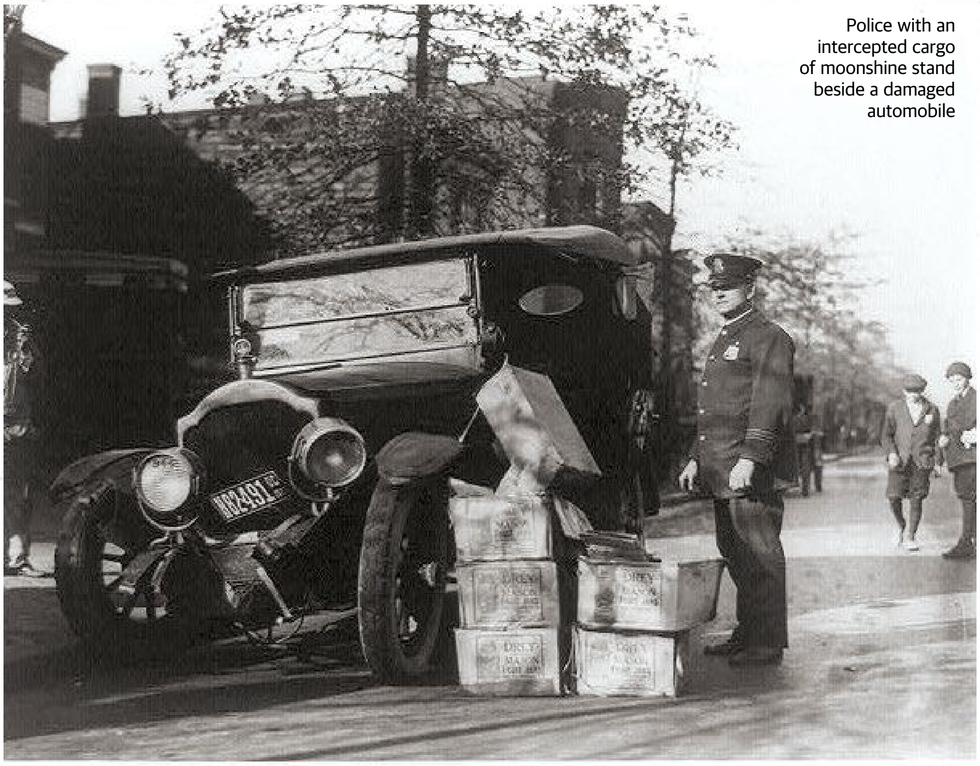
Lansky was invited to have his gang, a mixed group of Jews and Italians, work for Arnold Rothstein, one of the most prominent bosses of New York's organised criminal syndicates. Rothstein recognised Lansky's ambition and wanted Lansky's help in moving liquor – doing the actual work of bootlegging.

Rothstein's instincts regarding Lansky were correct. Under his guidance, Lansky and his youthful mob associates built the biggest bootlegging operation in the United States. Lansky would later go on to establish a portfolio of gambling casinos, which proved popular because the games played there were fair. Lansky, in the



Meyer Lansky, one of the greatest of Prohibition gangsters, lived to be 80, dying in 1983

> "The US Navy requested Luciano ensure that the docks remained secure. In 1946, on account of his aid, his prison sentence was commuted"



Police with an intercepted cargo of moonshine stand beside a damaged automobile

1940s, would also be involved in the development of Las Vegas as a centre of legal gambling.

Knowing Luciano from an early age was also a plus. Lansky became an important member of the national criminal organisation that would come to dominate America in the 1930s. Lansky could not escape justice forever, though, and in 1953 was brought up on multiple charges of illegal betting. After pleading guilty to some of the charges, he was given a sentence of only three months.

Lansky would later become a leading underworld figure in Cuba, where he was involved with casinos on the island. However, the Cuban Revolution of the 1950s saw the communists come to power, expel the mobsters and close the casinos. Lansky lived in Florida during the 1960s and 1970s. Expecting to be eventually charged with tax evasion, Lansky fled to Israel in 1970, but he was ordered to leave by the Israeli government in 1972. Ironically, Lansky would be acquitted in 1974, and died in 1983 in Miami Beach.

Few gangsters of the Prohibition period were more colourful than Bugsy Siegel, Meyer Lansky's close associate from an early age. In his younger days during Prohibition, Siegel was a hot-headed gunman who took contracts from the likes of Joe Masseria and Salvatore Maranzano.

Dean O'Banion, chieftain of Chicago's North Side Gang, was assassinated by mob rival Johnny Torrio in 1924

Generational conflict

The relations between the various gangs of the American underworld were always fraught with suspicion and deadly violence. One such especially awful conflict between rival gangs was the so-called 'Castellammarese War' of 1930-1931, which took its name from the Sicilian town of Castellammare del Golfo in west Sicily, which is where one leading American crime boss, Salvatore Maranzano, had been born.

The Castellammarese War, which began in February 1930, was a lethal power struggle between Maranzano and Joe 'the Boss' Masseria for control of the mob, but it has also been portrayed as a generational conflict in which younger mobsters, 'Young Turks' or 'Americans', overthrew the older 'Mustache Petes', with their luxurious facial hair, who represented the traditional Mafia in America. The younger group of gangsters was exemplified by Lucky Luciano, who had grown up in America. Luciano had been deeply involved in the rubout of Masseria at a Coney Island restaurant on 15 April 1931, which brought the Castellammarese War to a close. This allowed Maranzano to declare himself to be the 'boss of all bosses' of the New York Mafia.

Luciano was also behind the 10 September 1931 murder of Maranzano himself, just a few months after Maranzano's faction claimed to have 'won' the war. Masseria and Maranzano were no innocents, of course. Luciano was simply striking first once he had learned that each man wanted him dead too.

As with almost all Mafia-related history, the actual facts are murky and it is often impossible to separate truth from fiction. Traditional accounts have held that the war involved hundreds of gangsters across America and that around 60 perished in the struggle. Others say the carnage was much lighter, holding that the death toll was closer to around 14.

Joe Masseria was Lucky Luciano's boss during Prohibition and was a casualty of the Castellammarese War

In the show, the Peaky Blinders enlist the help of Al Capone to outsmart fictional mob boss Luca Changretta (Adrien Brody, pictured)

He was nicknamed Bugsy, which he detested, supposedly because he was judged unstable, and other gangsters would say he was 'going bugs' when he became agitated. In 1937, after Prohibition had ended, he headed out west to Hollywood where he set up a gambling operation.

By 1946, Siegel was overseeing the building of the Flamingo Hotel in Las Vegas. The Flamingo was his biggest undertaking, and entirely above-board, because gambling was legal in Nevada. Unfortunately, it turned out to be a huge money-loser, suffering from enormous cost overruns and delays. A project that had initially been budgeted at $1 million ended up costing about six. The Flamingo opened in late 1946 but was plagued with troubles. His investors, many of them other mobsters, were very unhappy and not an understanding bunch. Siegel was assassinated in 1947 at the home of his girlfriend, with nine shots fired, and two striking him. Suspicion of course fell on his disappointed gangster investors, but there were any number of people who would have wanted Siegel dead.

One of the mob's foremost assassins during the Prohibition era was Albert Anastasia. Anastasia has been placed as part of the group of gunmen who murdered Joe Masseria. One of the men who was said to have gone along with him on the hit headed up Murder, Inc with Anastasia. Murder, Inc was a Brooklyn, New York-based outfit of assassins who would rub out any target for a price. The advantage of using Murder, Inc's services, from a mob boss's point of view, was that the order to kill was sent from him to his lieutenant and then to the hitmen of Murder, Inc. The assassins did not know who was actually paying for the hit, and so there was very little to connect the bosses to any of the murders they had commissioned.

One of the most prominent victims of Murder, Inc was another mobster, Dutch Schultz. Schultz had made a request to the Commission that it authorise the murder of Thomas Dewey, a federal prosecutor who had indicted Schultz twice for tax evasion. Schultz, knowing that Dewey would never give up, wanted him dead. The Commission saw matters very differently. Killing Dewey would only serve to increase federal attention on the mob and it turned Schultz down. Schultz unwisely then declared that he would do the job himself. To forestall a murder that would bring nothing but bad things, Luciano authorised a hit on Schultz. On 23 October 1935, two Murder, Inc gunmen mowed down Schultz and his bodyguards at a New Jersey restaurant.

Attention falls mainly on Chicago and New York as hotspots of underworld activity during Prohibition, but there were gangs in other cities, too. Detroit was the domain of the Purple Gang. Standing atop the pyramid of the Detroit underworld, it was a Jewish gang with a penchant for murder, with 500 deaths being attributed to its members. This figure is even higher than those that were found in super-violent Chicago. A large number of the Purple Gang's members had emigrated from Eastern Europe in the late 19th century. It was led by the Bernstein brothers – Raymond, Joseph, Abe and Izzy. After coming to New York, they settled in Michigan.

Starting out as small-time criminals as youngsters, they graduated to bigger things as adults. Prohibition provided them with extraordinary opportunities. Detroit, the capital

A timeline of Prohibition and the American mob

1920

Prohibition begins
The 18th Amendment, banning the production and sale of alcoholic beverages, goes into effect in January 1920. American organised crime scrambles to supply it to thirsty customers.
17 January 1920

1920

Johnny Torrio assassinates Big Jim Colosimo
In Chicago, Johnny Torrio has 'Big Jim' Colosimo assassinated. One of Torrio's underlings is Al Capone, who will later take over his Chicago operations.
11 May 1920

1929

St Valentine's Day Massacre
In a mass murder organised by Chicago crime boss Al Capone, four men, including two posing as police officers, gun down seven members of the rival North Side Gang in a garage.
14 February 1929

Detroit police raid an illegal brewery during Prohibition years

1931

Castellammarese War ends
Joe Masseria is assassinated, at Lucky Luciano's direction, bringing the Castellammarese War between him and Salvatore Maranzano to a violent end.
15 April 1931

The body of Salvatore Maranzano following his assassination on 10 September 1931

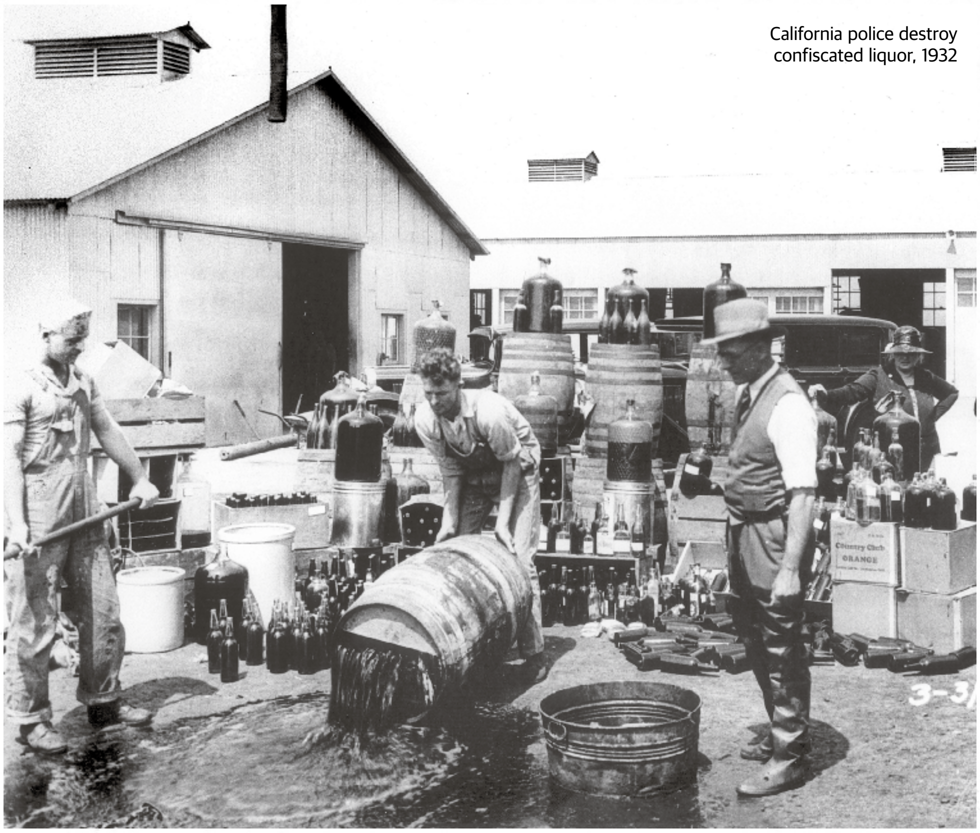
1931

Collingwood Manor Massacre
The Purple Gang slaughters the Third Avenue Terrors at a Collingwood Avenue apartment in Detroit but a witness survives and goes on to testify against them. Several Purple Gang members are convicted and given life sentences.
16 September 1931

1931

The Commission
Luciano sets up the 'Commission' to resolve disputes among the mob's Five Families and a handful of other criminal groups. It relies on the services of Murder, Inc to enforce discipline on unruly mobsters.
1931

Johnny Torrio, a leading gangster of the early Prohibition years and mentor of Al Capone


California police destroy confiscated liquor, 1932

> “Canada became the place where liquor could be obtained and smuggled into the United States”

of American automobile manufacturing, was America’s fourth-largest city and had a population of around 1 million. Importantly for the role it would play during Prohibition, Detroit lay on the US-Canadian border. This was significant because Canada became the place where liquor could be obtained and smuggled into the United States to quench the thirsts of American drinkers. When the Detroit River froze over in the winter, American bootleggers’ trucks would roll over with cargoes of Canadian spirits.

The Purple Gang had a hand in extortion rackets, truck hijackings, prostitution, illegal gambling and armed robberies. The bulk of the gang’s funds came from bootlegging alcohol. The money they earned was used to pay bribes to police and other government officials to look the other way. In the mid-1920s, the Purple Gang fought tooth and nail with Italian and Irish gangsters over territory. Such was their known power and propensity for violence that they were able to dissuade Al Capone, who was hardly reluctant to use violent tactics himself, to keep out of Detroit.

Eventually, the Purple Gang’s brutal ways brought about its downfall. In 1931, a hit gone wrong resulted in a survivor who testified against the gangsters and several of its leading members, including Raymond Bernstein, were given life sentences without the possibility of parole. The Purple Gang was mortally wounded, and soon faded from the Detroit scene.

Prohibition came to an end in 1933 with the repeal of the 18th Amendment. The mob, which had profited so enormously from Prohibition, had become far stronger than it otherwise might have been by having the opportunity to sell liquor for huge amounts of cash. It would go on to find other sources of revenue, now that alcohol was legal again, and prosper. It exists still.

Federal prosecutor Thomas E Dewey, the target of mobster Dutch Schultz’s murderous wrath

A New York Police Department mugshot of Lucky Luciano, taken in 1931

1935

Assassination of Dutch Schultz
After antagonising the Commission with his dangerous plan to kill Thomas Dewey, a federal prosecutor, Murder, Inc hitmen shoot rogue mobster Dutch Schultz at the Palace Chop House, a Newark, New Jersey restaurant. He dies the next day.
23 October 1935

1936

Trial of Luciano
Lucky Luciano goes to trial on prostitution-related charges. He is later convicted and is sentenced to 40 years in prison. This is a virtual life sentence for Luciano.
13 May 1936

1946

Luciano gets out
Lucky Luciano’s lengthy prison sentence is commuted and he is released from prison because of the help he gave in securing American ports from Axis sabotage.
3 January 1946

Bugsy Siegel was gunned down at the age of 41

1947

Bugsy Siegel is assassinated
Bugsy Siegel meets his end when a hail of bullets tears through the home of his girlfriend. Disgruntled mob investors in his Flamingo Hotel are likely behind the hit.
20 June 1947

1962

Luciano’s end
Lucky Luciano suffers a heart attack in Naples, Italy and dies at the age of 64.
26 January 1962

Images: Getty images; Alamy

Series five features fascist Oswald Mosley (Sam Claflin), a dangerous man who poses a significant threat to national security

1929

SERIES FIVE

100 **THE WALL STREET CRASH**
Series five opens with the Shelbys losing a fortune on 'Black Tuesday'. Find out what caused the 20th century's biggest financial crisis

106 **GLASGOW RAZOR GANGS**
Learn more about the Glaswegian Billy Boys gang who inspired this series' violent antagonists

110 **BRILLIANT CHANG**
The suave Chang supplies the Peaky Blinders with opium in the show; his real-life inspiration was painted as an international drug mastermind in the press

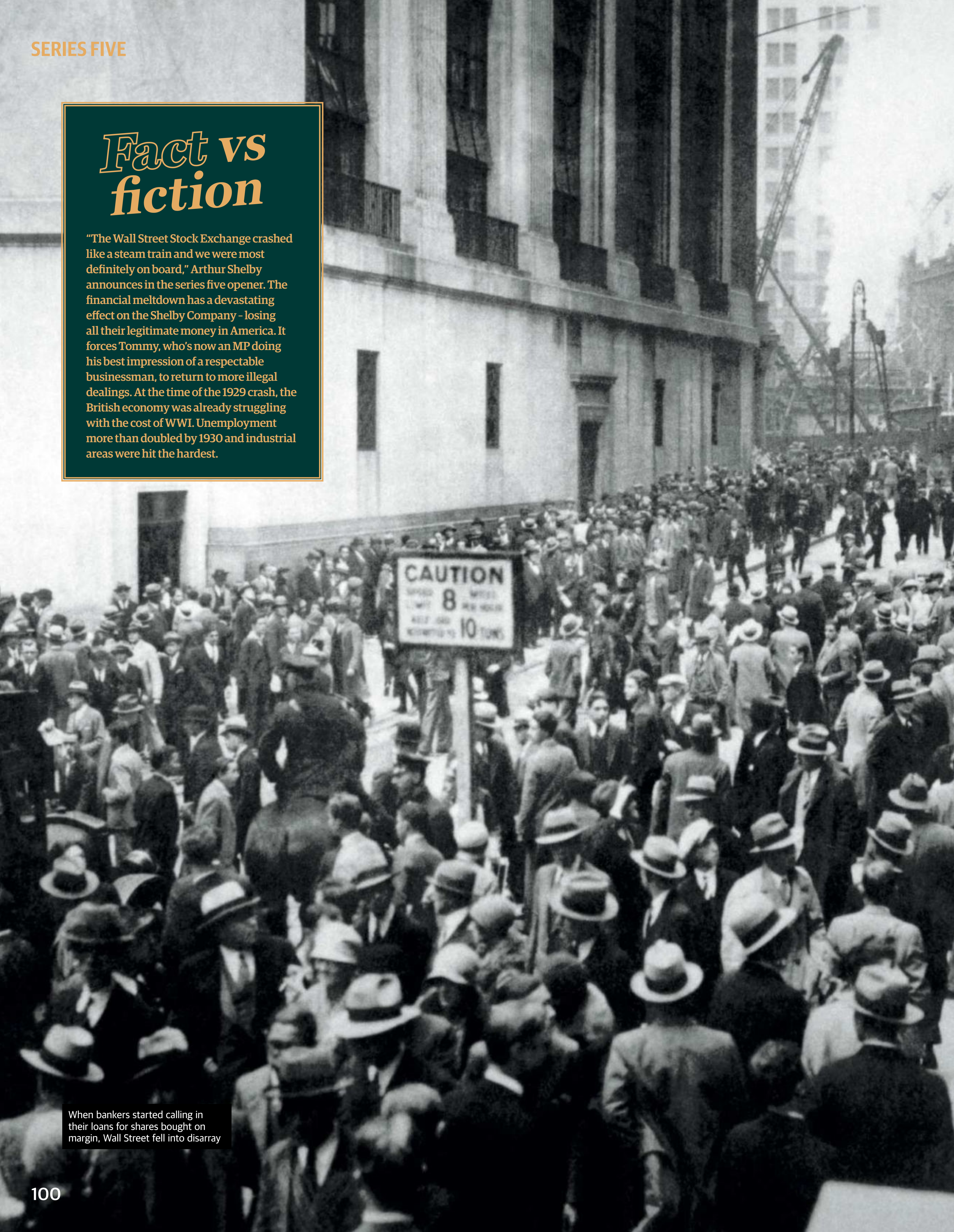
112 **TIMELINE: THE RISE OF FASCISM**
Throughout the 1930s, a terrifying political ideology was spreading throughout Europe, a movement that would ultimately lead to war...

114 **OSWALD MOSLEY AND THE BRITISH UNION OF FASCISTS**
As an MP, Tommy meets Oswald Mosley - perhaps his most dangerous adversary yet. As in the show, Mosley founded the BUF and wanted to make Britain a fascist nation

Image: Alamy

Fact vs fiction

"The Wall Street Stock Exchange crashed like a steam train and we were most definitely on board," Arthur Shelby announces in the series five opener. The financial meltdown has a devastating effect on the Shelby Company - losing all their legitimate money in America. It forces Tommy, who's now an MP doing his best impression of a respectable businessman, to return to more illegal dealings. At the time of the 1929 crash, the British economy was already struggling with the cost of WWI. Unemployment more than doubled by 1930 and industrial areas were hit the hardest.



When bankers started calling in their loans for shares bought on margin, Wall Street fell into disarray

SERIES FIVE

THE WALL STREET CRASH

After years of miraculous growth and prosperity, it all came undone in just a few fateful days of chaos

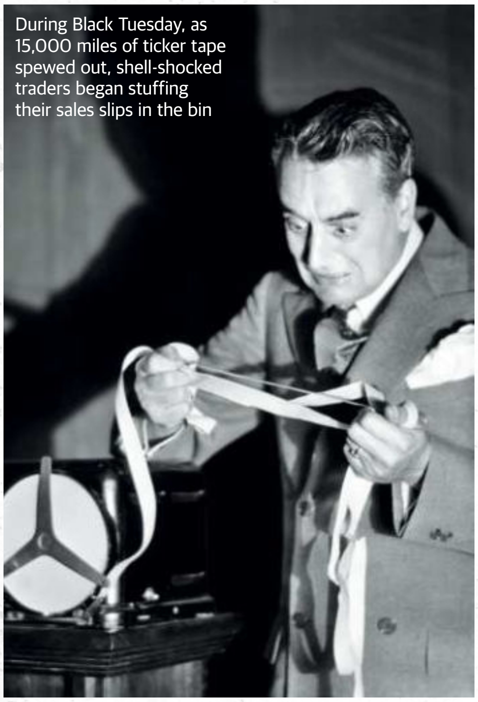
Words Hareth Al Bustani

After years of rampant speculation, New York's bull market finally peaked on 3 September 1929. When share prices fell slightly a few days later, most observers assumed it was just a standard adjustment. Although prices continued to drop, speculators played the market and bankers loaned out more money than ever before.

By 21 October, so many shares were being dumped that the telegraphic ticker, which reported transactions to traders countrywide, fell behind - people knew they were losing money, they just had no idea how much. This escalated matters into hysteria, with shareholders panicking and selling off their stock, leading to further losses.

In the last hour of Wednesday 23 October, a landslide was triggered, with 6 million shares sold off, wiping out $4 billion - all of the astronomical gains from July and August - from the Dow Jones. With the ticker two hours behind by the day's close, the uncomfortable truth began to sink in: all was not well on the New York Stock Exchange. Investors, who had for so long enjoyed the benefits of margins, now found that their banks were calling in their loans.

On 24 October, a day that would henceforth be known as Black Thursday, the *New York Times* reported that the "avalanche of selling" the day before had brought about "one of the widest declines in history". However, the worst was yet to come. By noon, a further $9 billion was wiped out. As the ticker began to run four hours late, a group of bankers, led by Thomas Lamont from JP Morgan, rushed together to try to prop up prices, helping to salvage


During Black Tuesday, as 15,000 miles of ticker tape spewed out, shell-shocked traders began stuffing their sales slips in the bin

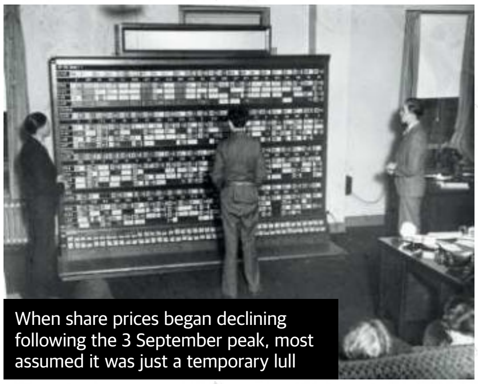
some of the worst losses and recovering back to one-third of the previous day's prices.

The next day, eager to restore confidence to the market, President Hoover announced that "the fundamental business of the country, that is, production and distribution of commodities, is on a sound and prosperous basis". Sure enough, the prices stabilised on Friday and Saturday. However, on the following Monday, the bottom fell out like never before. As the Dow lost 38 points - nearly 13 percent of its value - in a single day, the bankers resigned themselves to their fate.

Journalist Jonathan Leonard reported that 9,212,800 shares were sold, with the Times index falling by almost 50 points to 318.29. "That night," he wrote, "Wall Street was lit up like a Christmas tree. Restaurants, barber shops, and speakeasies were open and doing a roaring business. Messenger boys and runners raced through the streets whooping and singing at the tops of their lungs. Slum children invaded the district to play with balls of ticker tape. Well-dressed gentlemen fell asleep at lunch counters. All the downtown hotels, rooming houses, even flophouses were full of financial employees who usually slept in the Bronx. It was probably Wall Street's worst night. Not only had the day been bad, but everybody down to the youngest office boy had a pretty good idea of what was going to happen tomorrow."

That night, a bad omen hung in the air - an overwhelming realisation that the American way of life itself was on the brink of collapse, that the new era of great prosperity was over, just as it had begun. "Even the outriders of the New Era felt that if everybody pretended to be happy, their phoney smiles would blow the trouble away," wrote Leonard. New York Mayor Jimmy Walker asked the cinemas to "show only cheerful pictures", *True Story Magazine* ran full-page advertisements encouraging people to buy luxuries on credit, and McGraw-Hill, "another publishing house with boom-time megalomania", simply "told the public to avert its eyes from the obscene spectacle in Wall Street". Leonard added: "What they did not observe would not affect their state of mind and good times could continue as before."

As morning broke on 29 October - Black Tuesday - traders woke up sore on office floors, unable to hear the trading bell ring amid the screams of "Sell! Sell! Sell!". In the first half hour alone, 3 million shares traded hands. Local and international phone lines were jammed, along with cables, radios and wires. As the day went on, Herculean quantities of stock were unloaded, and, running out of places to store their sales slips, traders simply began stuffing them in the bin. Unable to find buyers at any price, some simply stared into space, dumbfounded. Others fainted, or broke into fistfights, as 15,000 miles of ticker tape continued to spew out. When bankers called in their margins, anyone who could not afford to pay was forced to


When share prices began declining following the 3 September peak, most assumed it was just a temporary lull

sell. For many, this meant that their life savings were wiped out instantaneously.

Rumours began to circulate of bankers throwing themselves off buildings across the city. While these numbers were exaggerated, Winston Churchill, who was in New York visiting his friend Percy Rockefeller, remembered: "Under my window a gentleman cast himself down 15 storeys and was dashed to pieces, causing a wild commotion and the

The gathering storm

A week after the crash, President Hoover admitted that the country had passed through a period of overspeculation, which had always been destined to "crash due to its own weight". Despite this, he claimed that the financial world was functioning as normal, and that thanks to the Federal Reserve System the crisis had "not extended into either the production activities of the country or the financial fabric of the country".

However, in the wake of the crash, the miracle of leveraging unravelled, as the margin loans that had created so much wealth were called in on the way down. Those who could not afford to pay were forced to sell. In the three weeks after Black Tuesday, millions of forced sales further fuelled the stock market collapse - wiping out $26 billion by mid November.

By now, papers like *The Nation* were already running pessimistic articles with titles such as "The Men Who Did It", arguing: "What bankers and brokers know very well, however, is that the Federal Reserve is the body primarily to thank for the disaster which the stock market has just gone through." By December, there was now no denying that America's financial institutions were in very real danger, with industrial production down by 10 percent and imports by 20 percent.

KEY'S
INGTON
UTH
FROM MINNESOTA ARR
COUNTRY TO WASHI
IN
VIKING EIGHT S
V-EIGHT
DULUTH
BILE DEALER.
Making no mention of the crash, President Hoover instead used his Thanksgiving address to celebrate America's "exceptional prosperity"

OWHEAD
NGTON
EDAN

arrival of the fire brigade." By the end of the day, 16.4 million shares had changed hands, a record that would stand for nearly four decades.

Five hours after the crash, President Hoover's secretary sent him a memo, informing him that "Mr Rand, of Remington-Rand Company, has just telephoned, stating that he thinks you should issue a statement to the press tonight for publication tomorrow morning, such as this: 'I am of the opinion that speculators' excessives have been thoroughly liquidated and sound investment securities have been reduced to a safe and attractive level. Now is the time for Bankers, Brokers, and Investors to exercise the utmost of patience and cool judgement in all dealings with one another.'"

In fact, Rand warned him that if the dire situation carried on for another two days, millions of businessmen would be ruined. For many, the damage had already been done. Georgia banker Raymond Tarver said: "There were thousands who went down during the panic – lost fortunes, homes, businesses, and in fact everything. Some have survived, and many never will. A great many were too old to begin building up again."

Small-time buyers, who'd bought their stocks on margin, had not banked on values actually going down, and began pawning off anything of value, from china to jewellery. Others lost far more. Greek immigrant George Mehales, who owned a diner in South Carolina, recalled: "They told me I needed more cash to cover up. I couldn't get it." Both he and his brother were wiped out that day. "I considered killing myself, 'cause I had nothing left. I found out what a fool I had been." He was only able to pay off his debts by selling the cafe at "rock-bottom" price.

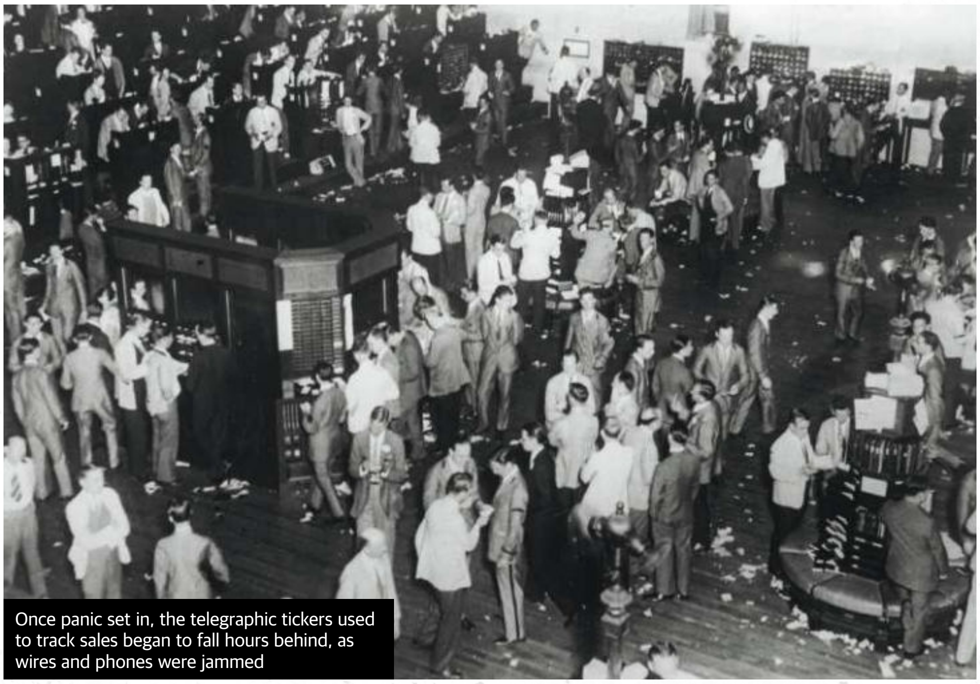
The next morning, *The Guardian* reported that the bankers group fighting the market decline had lowered their margin on loans from 50 percent to 25. "A reflection of the slump in New York was seen on the London Stock Exchange, where there were heavy sales, and 'street market' excitement until well into the evening. The Canadian exchanges were hard hit yesterday by the slump."

Although the *New York Evening Post* reported that "the Street is going through the greatest disaster in its history", it remained optimistic that with loans and credit in abundance, "good must come even from this stern and cruel housecleaning". With a rousing send-off, the paper continued: "Such stocks are the bone and sinew of the country. Not to believe in them is not to believe in America. The world has so many things that must be done, and no one can do them better than our own people. Our business strength has pulled us out of difficulties in days gone by. With faith it will do it again."

The *Birmingham Age-Herald* was also optimistic, placing its faith in the Federal Reserve: "There will be no panic because the United States has gotten beyond that stage in its economic development." While the *Montgomery Journal* believed the collapse, which had "been predicted by careful observers for many weeks", was simply a period of correction, the *Denver Post* was less forgiving, stating that: "Every man who is buying and selling on margin is gambling. And the snowball they have been rolling uphill got too big and heavy and rolled back over them. The little fellow is not alone to blame for present conditions; the big fellows, bankers, brokers, money lenders, are equally to blame."

Average Americans could be forgiven for wishful thinking. After all, the next day saw an incredible recovery, making back two-thirds of Black Tuesday's losses, and after a short session on Thursday the market closed for the rest of the week. However, when it reopened on Monday 4 November, it collapsed yet again, with the Times industries losing 22 points, then a further 37 points on Wednesday and 50 more over the first three days of the next week. The bubble had popped and the stock market was now in free fall, thundering down upon the very foundation of American enterprise – dragging businesses, bankers and average Americans down with it.

> "The little fellow is not alone to blame; the big fellows, bankers, brokers, money lenders, are equally to blame"



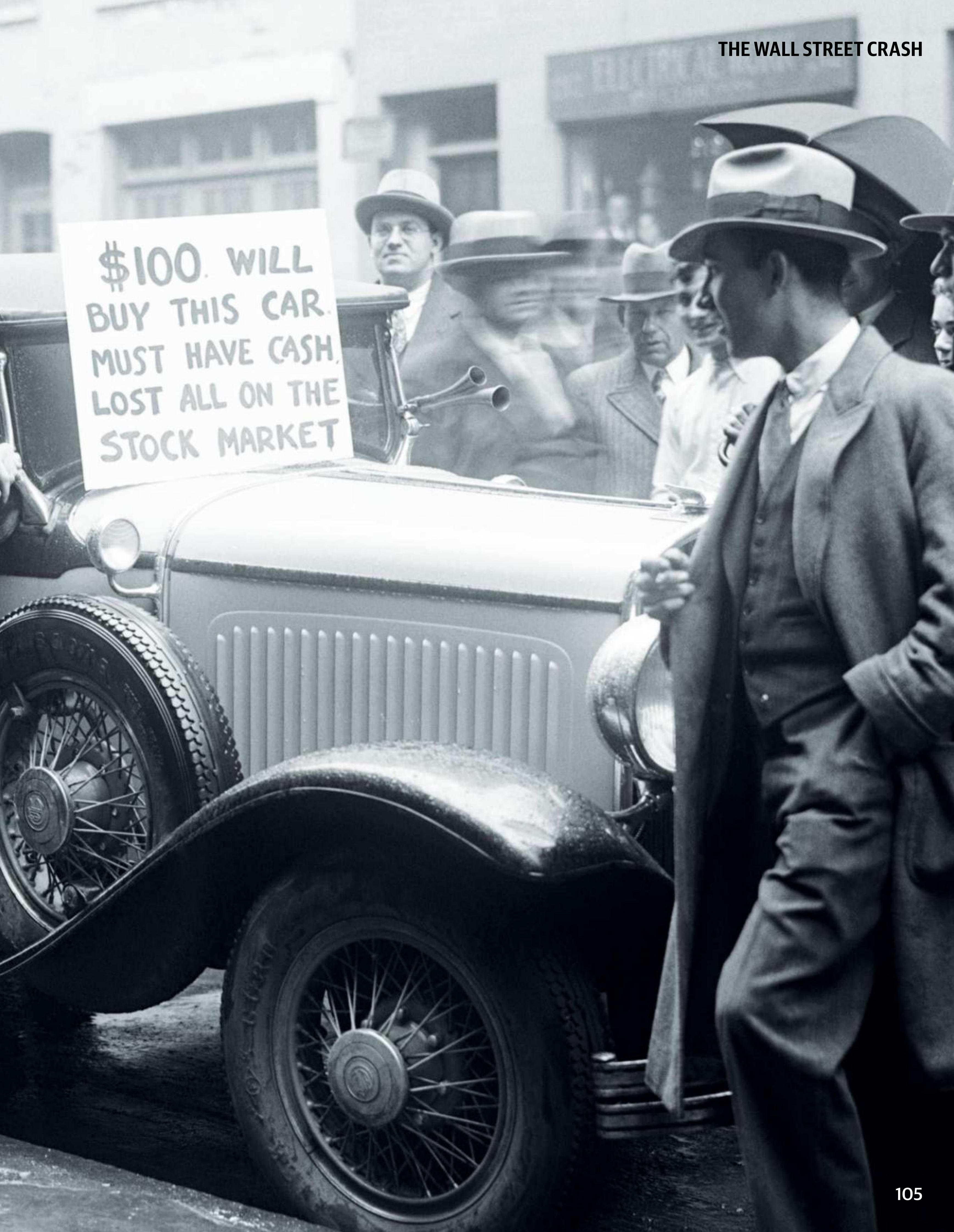
Once panic set in, the telegraphic tickers used to track sales began to fall hours behind, as wires and phones were jammed

Images: Alamy; Getty

© Getty / Bettmann

PANIC AND BANKRUPTCY

After the bull market peaked and began to drop in September, slight concern quickly snowballed into full-blown panic. As terrified speculators hysterically rushed to sell their stock, prices plummeted and bankers called in their loans. Those who could not afford to pay had to sell, bankrupting many small-time investors overnight.


$100. WILL
BUY THIS CAR.
MUST HAVE CASH.
LOST ALL ON THE
STOCK MARKET

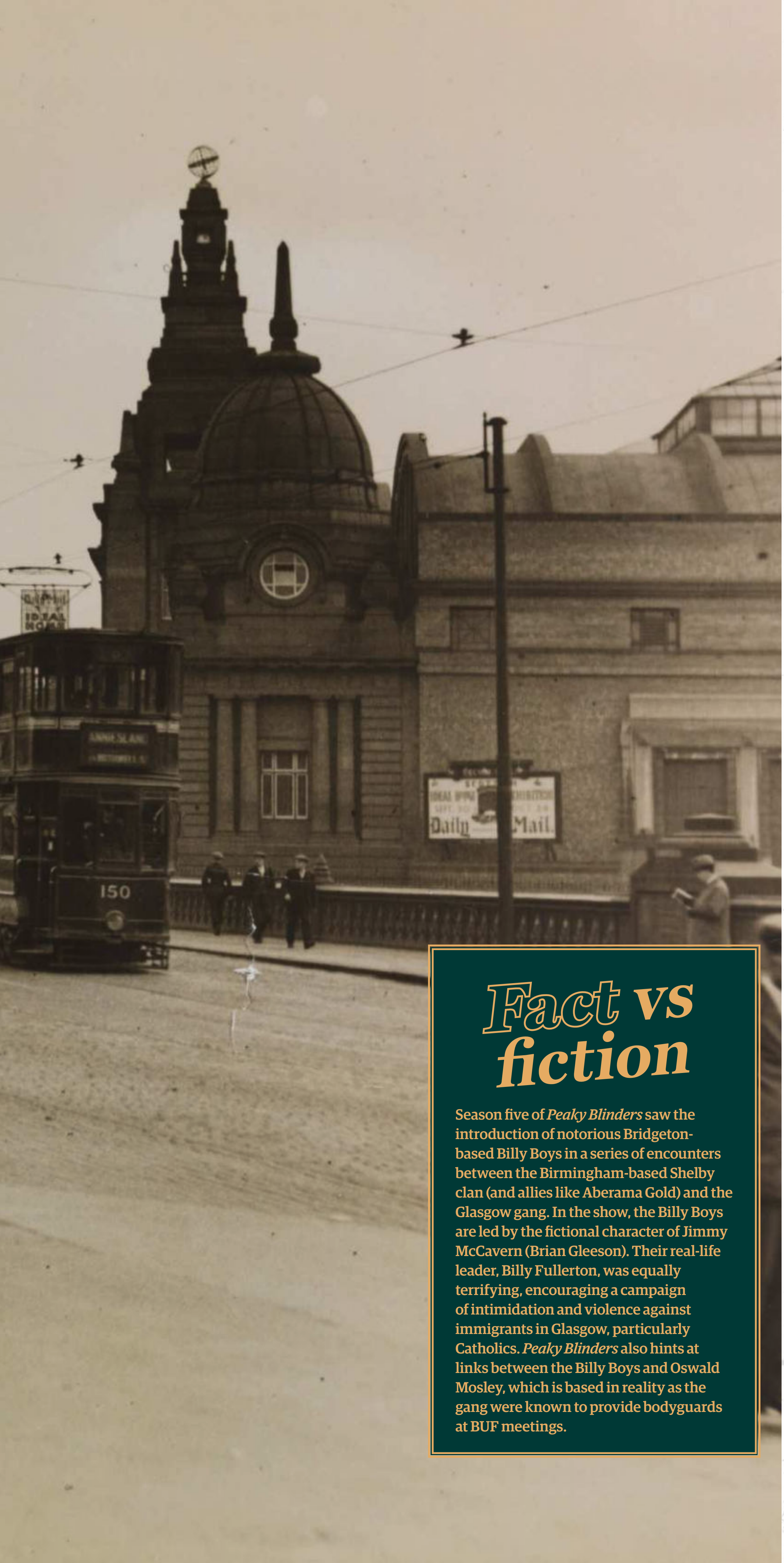
SERIES FIVE

THE GLASGOW RAZOR GANGS

How Glasgow's bloody bands of slashers terrorised the city's streets

Words Tanita Matthews

Glasgow in the 1920s and 30s was home to viscous gangs, out for blood



Today, the city of Glasgow is one of the UK's most popular and vibrant cities and ranks as the most desirable Scottish cities to live in. Residents can pay from £200,000 to £1.5 million for a trendy art nouveau dwelling. Now a cultural hub with under the rule of Scotland's independent government, with a rich historic tapestry and a bustling vibe spewing from its many bars, nightclubs and restaurants, Glasgow in the 1920s was like going through the looking glass: one of Britain's most dangerous cities it was rife with gang violence, particularly in the Gorbals area. Glasgow in the 1920s and 30s experienced radical change. While the conclusion of World War One had come as a great relief for Britain, the economic landscape, especially in Scotland, was unstable. Major industries such as shipbuilding and heavy engineering were in steep decline, and after the Wall Street Crash of 1929, Scotland sunk further into economic distress. Unemployment boomed and by 1931, a third of Scotland's residents found themselves unemployed.

Glasgow's economy wasn't the only thing changing. Predominantly a Protestant city, it was becoming home to a new wave of Catholic Irish migrants, who were settling within the walls of Glasgow's already severely overcrowded community. The natives, many already living permanently on the breadline in soot-infested four-storey tenements, felt threatened by not only with the fierce competition for scarce jobs but also the threat of a new religious sector. As a result sectarian violence was the norm on a religious holiday or sporting event.

For the desperate and destitute working-class male, a gang was seen as not only a form of protection from their new neighbours but also a sense of camaraderie, especially for young boys who were lacking direction. No longer could they follow their father's footsteps down a mine or into a shipyard, instead they had to follow the examples of their downtrodden seniors, jaded from years of redundancy and broken promises of post-war prosperity. The gangs were mostly based in working-class districts, a characteristic reflective in their namesakes: The Bridgerton Billy Boys, based in an area to the east of Glasgow city centre called Bridgeton (also known as 'Brigton'), The Calton Entry, a gang based in the area of Calton, just north of the River Clyde, and just to the east of the city centre and the South Side Stickers (a sticker being a Scottish slang term for a game fighter). By the end of the 1930s, more gangs such as the Beehive Boys, the San Toi, Tongs, the Fleet, Govan Team, and Bingo Boys emerged – smaller, equally-brutal groups.

Dr Andrew Davies, a senior lecturer in modern British history from the University of Liverpool and author of books such as *City of Gangs* and *The Gangs of Manchester*, researched vast amounts of police files, legal records and thousands of press reports for his writings. His research highlighted that although other Metropolitan areas of Britain were "plagued by gangs and 'knife crime' during the late nineteenth century" Glasgow's gangs were all that more persistent and notorious.

The police were desperate to control the trajectory of the city at the hands of violent gangs.

Fact vs fiction

Season five of *Peaky Blinders* saw the introduction of notorious Bridgeton-based Billy Boys in a series of encounters between the Birmingham-based Shelby clan (and allies like Aberama Gold) and the Glasgow gang. In the show, the Billy Boys are led by the fictional character of Jimmy McCavern (Brian Gleeson). Their real-life leader, Billy Fullerton, was equally terrifying, encouraging a campaign of intimidation and violence against immigrants in Glasgow, particularly Catholics. *Peaky Blinders* also hints at links between the Billy Boys and Oswald Mosley, which is based in reality as the gang were known to provide bodyguards at BUF meetings.

Sporting events such as football matches were a hotbed for violence and hooliganism as the Billy Boys frequented Ranger games where their racist chants and jeers saw retaliation from Catholic supporters

The relationship between the two entities was violent on both sides. Police tried to keep the peace on the streets but it was a battle they were fiercely outnumbered in. The neighbourhoods where the gangs lived and operated were difficult to police as residents refused to offer themselves up as witnesses or fear of the consequences. Instead the gangs continued to wage war on one another, armed with hammers, hatchets, razors, battens or iron and wood, coshes and broken bottles. The razor became a weapon of choice. A 'slasher' would not use his weapon fully open, as risk of injury to its user was also a concern, but instead would push it through the open bottom of its sheath and aim for the face of their enemy, The most visible mark of retribution in these wars was the 'Glasgow Smile', more commonly known as the Chelsea Smile, a slash at the corners of the mouth that left a ghastly scar mimicking a smile. Quickly performed with a razor, work knife, or even a shard of glass, the scar served as a warning to the rest of the city that the victim had got on the wrong side of a gangster.

While gangs had been a running undercurrent in Glasgow for much of the 1920s, significant events leapfrogged the life of a gangster into the Scottish national press, and just like blood soaked the shirt of an unfortunate victim, fear was absorbed by the general public. Newspapers were filled with stories on Glasgow's growing gang subculture and by the late 20s and early 30s, gang life was a festering problem for the city.

> "The neighbourhoods where the gangs lived and operated were difficult to police as residents refused to offer themselves up as witnesses or fear of the consequences"

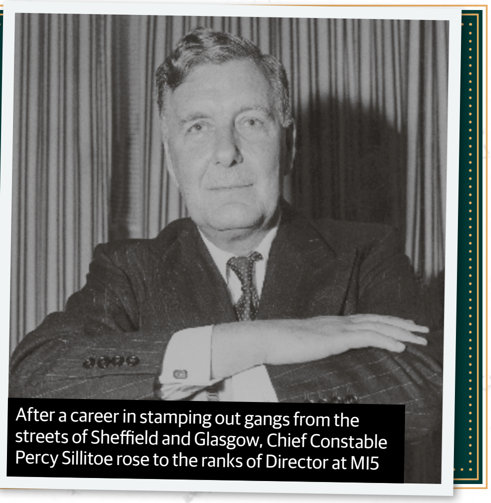
Actor Tommy Flanagan (who coincidentally plays Arthur Shelby Sr in *Peaky Blinders*, left) has scars of a 'Glasgow smile' after being attacked by thugs in Glasgow in the 1980s

Of the gangs residing within the vicinity of Glasgow's city centre, the Bridgeton Billy Boys were one of the most infamous and fearsome – as well as the largest and most powerful – of the city's gangs. As many as 800 members ran amok in the city's East End during the height of the gang's notoriety. The gang took their name from William of Orange, 'King Billy', whose triumph at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 secured Protesant rule in England, Ireland and Scotland. Their leader was a man named Billy Fullerton, who had worked his way up through the ranks of the Billy Boys by organising their Saturday trips to watch their football team, the Rangers, and collecting subscriptions from the members. The Bridgeton Billy Boys ran American-style protection rackets, terrorising shopkeepers and publicans demanding they pay a fee for protection. However, when speaking to a local paper in 1932, Fullerton depicted his gang in a somewhat chivalrous light. He insisted that the gang looked after the wives and children of members who were jailed. He was a 'family man' he told the reporter and that he was no crook or outlaw, just a man who shared the average mainstream values of any working-class man.

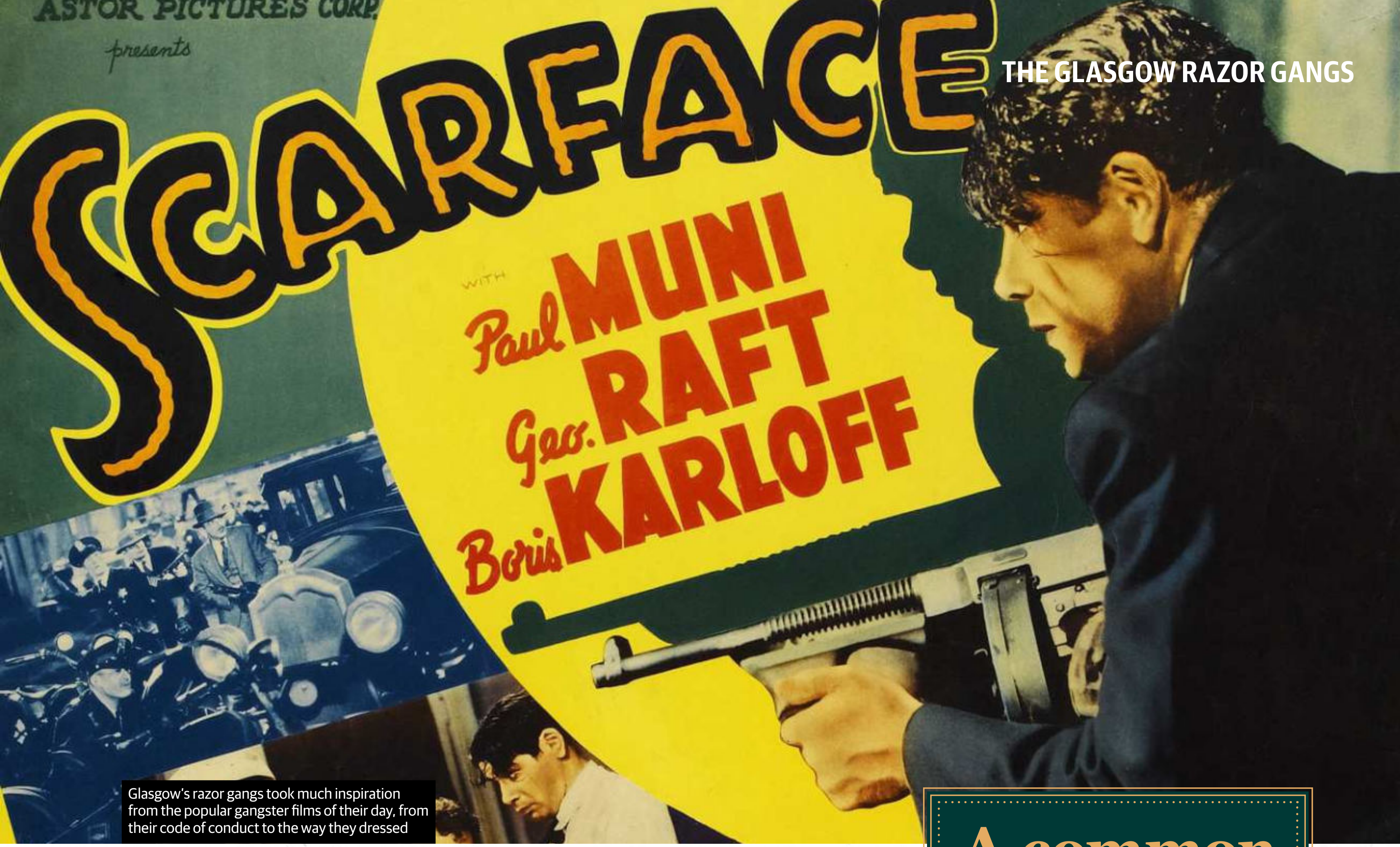
The Billy Boys' main rivalries were between Catholic gangs across the East End such as the Calton Entry Boys, the San Toy, the Kent Star

Glasgow's gangbuster

Chief Constable Percy Sillitoe was sworn in as Glasgow's new chief constable in December 1931. Formerly head of Sheffield's police force, Sillitoe's no-nonsense reputation had him hailed as a 'gangbuster' and the answer to Glasgow's gang problem. In Sheffield he had brought about a resolution to the ongoing feuds between the city's gangs by outsmarting them. As head of the second largest police force in the UK, Sillitoe modernised the force and utilised an army of informants including barmaids, publicans, prostitutes and ex-convicts, who passed information on to him on the movements of the city's most violent criminals. Sillitoe enlisted the support of the likes of the Glasgow Corporation, the Magistrates and the Procurator Fiscal. This trifecta along with the support for his officers, and the use of the Mounted Branch (nicknamed Sillitoe's Cossacks), eventually led to the imprisonment of many of the Glasgow gang leaders.



After a career in stamping out gangs from the streets of Sheffield and Glasgow, Chief Constable Percy Sillitoe rose to the ranks of Director at MI5



Glasgow's razor gangs took much inspiration from the popular gangster films of their day, from their code of conduct to the way they dressed

and the Norman Conks (Conquerors), who based themselves in Norman Street in Bridgeton, otherwise known as Dalmarnock. Particularly bitter clashes between the Billy Boys and the Norman Conks were regularly reported on, such as a brawl at Fullerton's wedding and the riot when Fullerton led members of the Orange Order into the Conks' stronghold in 1935. The Norman Conks, well known around the city as a large sectarian street gang, rivalled the Billy Boys but found allies with the Calton Tongs, another largely Roman Catholic gang. The gangs and their leaders saw themselves as mean as any Hollywood gangster on the big screen in the day. Classic gangster films such as *The Public Enemy* (1931) and *Scarface* (1932) paved the way for a new and exciting way of life where respect was the currency used in a world devoid of any real monetary gain.

It wasn't just the Billy Boys who rivalled the other gangs, the South Side Stickers and the Liberty Boys were reportedly at war for the best part of a decade from the 1920s. One notorious fight broke out between the Young Calton Entry and the junior members of the South Side Stickers in May 1928. What had started out as a friendly outing soon turned violent and led to a fortnight of war on the streets of Glasgow between the two factions. Frank Kearney, leader of the Young Calton Entry challenged Joe Deehan, leader of the South Side gang, to a duel on Glasgow Green. At the last minute the venue was switched to Albert Bridge, a crossing between Calton and the Gorbals and by 9.30pm as many as thirty of the South Side Stickers made their way to the bridge and onto the Jail Square. Both gangs egged the other on, neither stepping forward to throw the first punch. In the heat of the moment a bystander, 17-year-old Jimmy Tait, who was connected to the Young Calton Entry was stabbed in the back by a 16-year-old South Side Sticker named James McClucky. Jimmy passed away in his hospital bed a few hours later, but not before he and his friends identified his attacker. At trial, McClusky's age spared him a death sentence.

Membership was by no means a casual arrangement, especially for the larger groups such as the Kent Star and Billy Boys whose secretaries arranged subscriptions and the employment of lawyers for when their members found themselves in the cells for a night or two. The groups also worked on a hierarchy system with 'senior' and 'junior' members. Much to the police's dismay, as soon as a 'senior' member of the gangs were taken into custody, an experienced junior would step in and the 'army' would remain strong and unaffected in its agenda.

For much of the 20s and early 30s, Glasgow's razor gangs dominated the city, but all that changed under the watchful eye of legendary chief of police, Sir Percy James Sillitoe, who was dubbed 'Scotland's Eliot Ness'. For much of the 30s Sillitoe focussed on bringing down the gangs of Glasgow, revolutionising the second largest police force in the UK in a bid to outsmart Fullerton and his rivals.

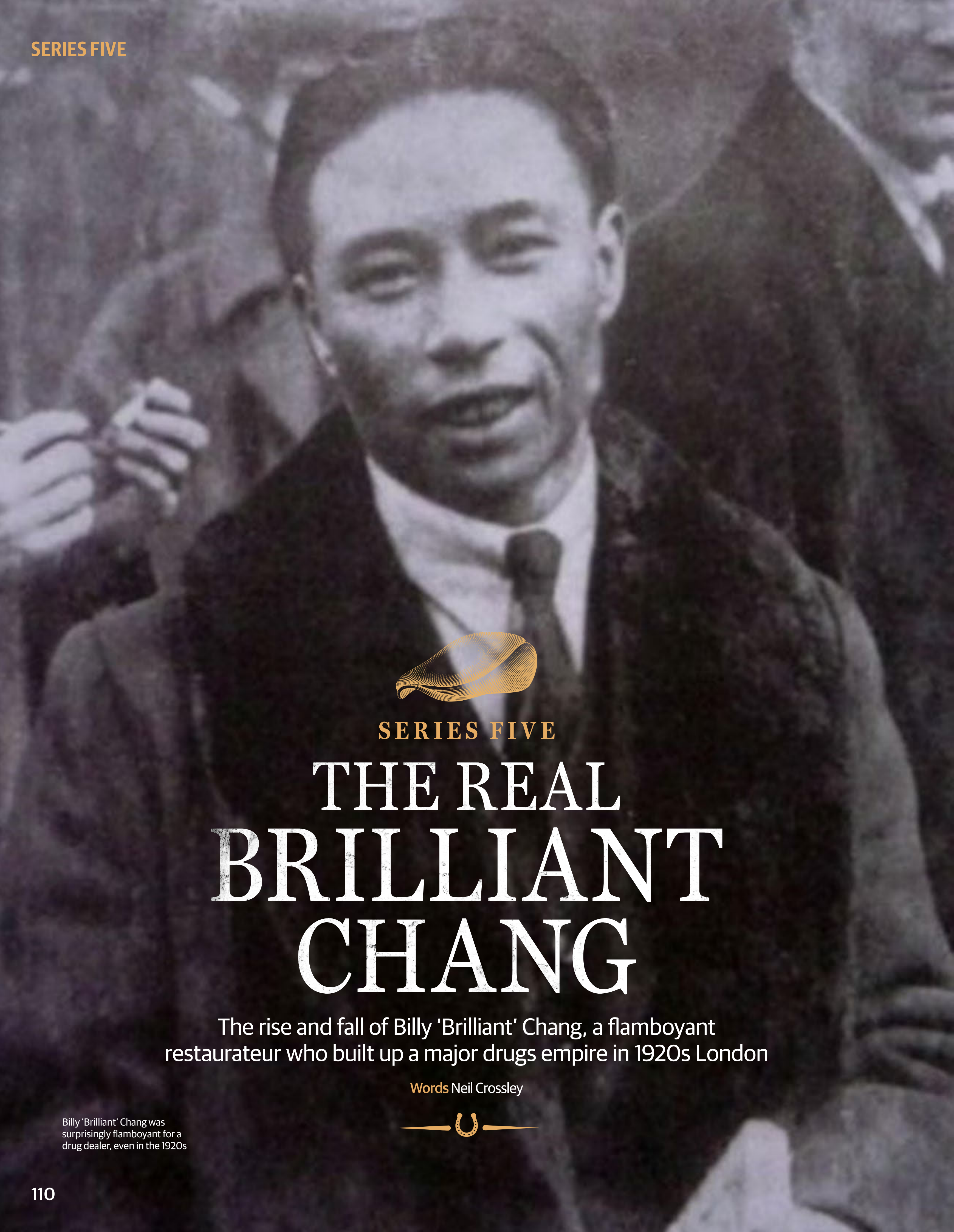
Eventually Sillitoe's strong will won – he made it impossible for the gangs to operate, although members insisted that the outbreak of the Second World War was the main reason they disbanded. Many of the once-fierce gang leaders have since retired or died, and although some strains of the gangs still exist in the city, the era of the Glasgow razor gangs remains simply a scar on the face of the country.

A common enemy

As implied in series five of *Peaky Blinders*, Oswald Mosley, leader of the British Fascists, and gang leader Billy Fullerton were in cahoots. As well as a gang leader, Fullerton was also a member of the British Fascists led by Mosley. The far-right totalitarianism group and the Billy Boys shared a common goal – to intimidate the Catholic population and make them feel as terrified and unwelcome as possible. The Billy Boys had orchestrated their own theme song named 'Billy Boys', which threatened death on the Catholics, a song which was regularly sung (and later banned) when they marched in protest through Catholic areas of Glasgow on Catholic holy days and at Rangers matches.

Former MP Oswald Mosley became disillusioned with mainstream politics and by the 1930s became the leader of the British Union of Fascists

Images: Alamy, Getty



SERIES FIVE

THE REAL BRILLIANT CHANG

The rise and fall of Billy 'Brilliant' Chang, a flamboyant restaurateur who built up a major drugs empire in 1920s London

Words Neil Crossley

Billy 'Brilliant' Chang was surprisingly flamboyant for a drug dealer, even in the 1920s

On 28 November 1918, 17 days after the end of the First World War, a gifted young actress called Billie Carleton had a starring role at the Victory Ball, a huge celebratory event at the Royal Albert Hall in London.

"It seemed that every man there wished to dance with her," gushed one newspaper report. "Her costume was extraordinary and daring to the utmost, but so attractive and refined was her face that it never occurred to anyone to be shocked. The costume consisted almost entirely of transparent black georgette."

The following morning, Carleton was found dead of an overdose in her apartment, adjacent to the Savoy Hotel. She was just 22 years old. On her bedside table was a small gold box of cocaine. At the subsequent inquest, it was concluded she had died of cocaine poisoning.

The inquest would shine a light on the lavish, high society parties of a Chinese drug dealer and restaurateur called Billy 'Brilliant' Chang. In the austerity of post-First World War London, young socialites would be drawn to the suave and urbane Chang. Carleton's death sparked the first drug scandal of the 20th century. The publicity that followed would ignite Chang's reputation as a social pariah of the emerging Jazz Age.

The man who became known as Brilliant Chang was born Chen Bao Luan in Canton, China, the son of an affluent mercantile family. He was highly educated, spoke several languages and had studied chemistry. In 1913, he travelled to England, and opened a restaurant in Birmingham. It's unclear how he got into the illegal drugs trade but by the time he moved to London in 1917, he was dealing cocaine, heroin and opium.

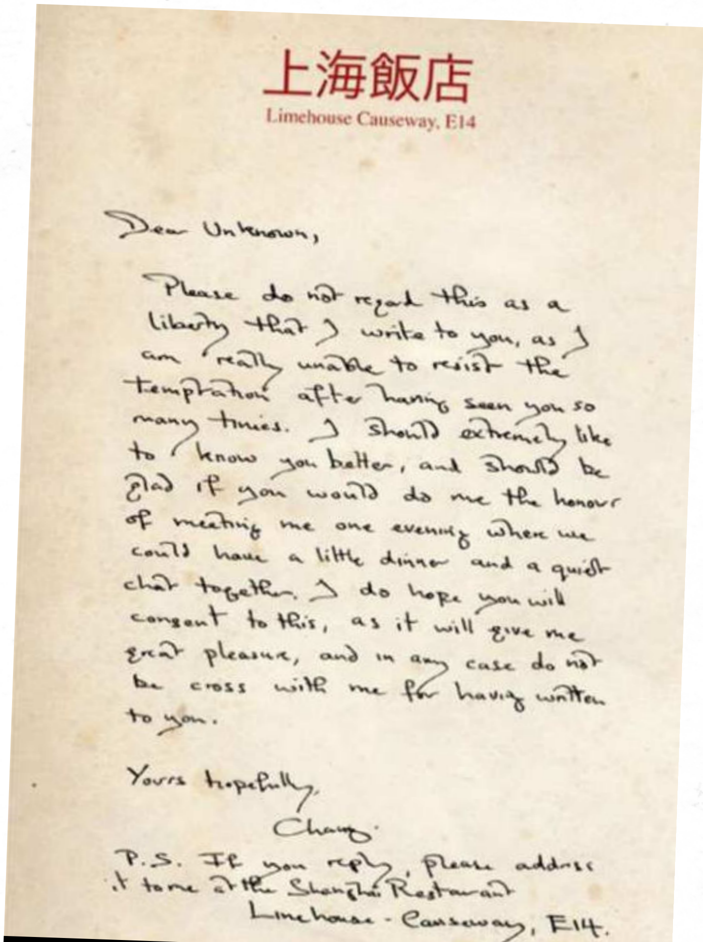
Chang helped look after his uncle's business interests, which included a restaurant at 107 Regent Street. He settled in an apartment in Limehouse, in the East End of London. His bedroom was luxuriously decorated with a blue and silver design featuring dragons.

Chang's easy manner, charisma and exotic appeal enabled him to build up a large female clientele that some sources said was akin to a fan club. His flamboyant style and the presence of his young socialite clients made him noticeable in the East End. He was already known to the police and the media following the death of Billie Carleton. But in 1922, an event occurred that would catapult him into the spotlight.

Fact vs fiction

The character Brilliant Chang (played by British-Japanese actor Andrew Koji) appears in series five of *Peaky Blinders* as a supplier of opium to the Peaky Blinders gang. While the series dramatises actual events, the characterisation does reflect some of the elements of his life. The real-life Chang was known for being well dressed, with a penchant for well-tailored fur-collared coats, a sartorial elegance reflected in his dramatic opening scene in the series.

On 6 March 1922, a young dancer and bar hostess called Freda Kempton died of a cocaine overdose at her home in Westbourne Grove. On the first day of the inquest into her death, her friend Rose Heinberg testified that she and Kempton had been at a club in Fitzrovia when they were invited to meet a man named Billy at his Chinese restaurant in Regent Street. At the restaurant, Billy asked Kempton to come outside, recalled Heinberg, and when Kempton returned, her mouth was twitching.



上海飯店
Limehouse Causeway, E14

Dear Unknown,

Please do not regard this as a liberty that I write to you, as I am really unable to resist the temptation after having seen you so many times. I should extremely like to know you better, and should be glad if you would do me the honour of meeting me one evening where we could have a little dinner and a quiet chat together. I do hope you will consent to this, as it will give me great pleasure, and in any case do not be cross with me for having written to you.

Yours hopefully,
Chang.

P.S. If you reply, please address it to me at the Shanghai Restaurant
Limehouse - Causeway, E14.

hang would ask waiters at his restaurant to give letters such as this one to young women, inviting them to dine with him

Heinberg told the inquest that she asked Kempton if she was eating something. "I have been drugged," replied Kempton. "I know I have been drugged, because a year ago, when I used to take drugs, my mouth used to twitch. I used to have to eat chewing gum to make people think I was eating sweets."

Chang was eventually called to testify. The coroner doubted his testimony, but felt there was insufficient evidence to bring a charge of manslaughter against him. The jury returned a verdict of suicide while temporarily insane. At this point, according to the *News of the World*, "Chang smiled broadly and quickly left the court. As he passed out, several well-dressed girls patted his shoulder, while one ran her fingers through his hair."

The publicity from the Freda Kempton case proved fatal for Chang's business. Newspapers and magazines wrote scandalous articles with lurid headlines. But his ultimate downfall came on 23 February 1924, when a chorus girl called Violet Payne was arrested at a pub in Limehouse, and charged with possession of cocaine. In her statement Chang was implicated and his house was searched. A single bag of cocaine was found and he was arrested.

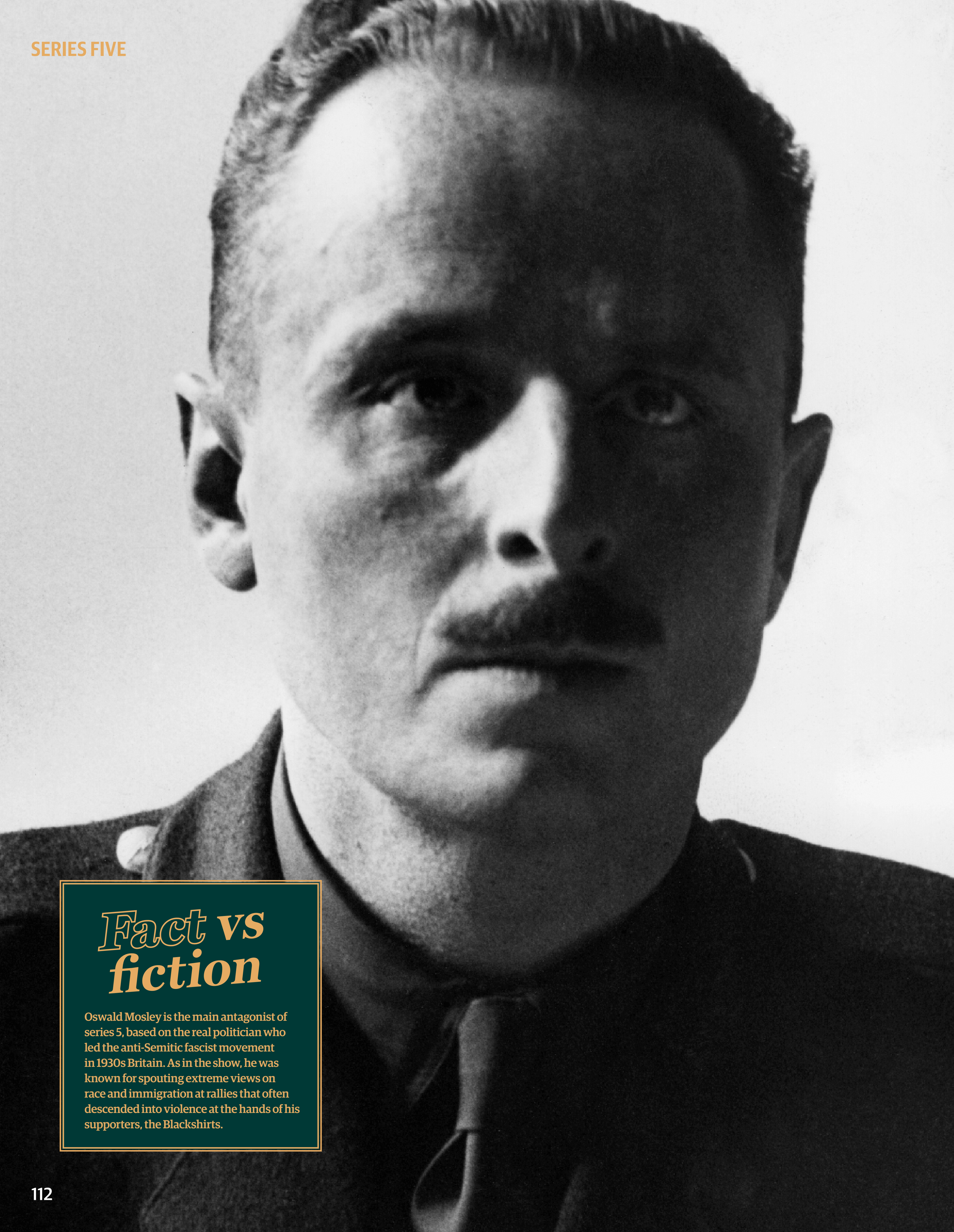
Chang stood trial and his defence crumbled when Payne mentioned that she sometimes spent the night at his home. A police detective observed that "this man would sell drugs to a white girl only if she gave herself to him as well as paying him. He has carried on the traffic with real Oriental craft and cunning". Chang was convicted, and on 10 April 1924, he was sentenced to 14 months in jail to be followed by deportation. "It is you and men like you who are corrupting the womanhood of this country," declared the judge.

The press had a field day. Drug taking and the implication of inter-racial sex between white women and a Chinese man reflected fears about white slavery, which was fuelled by novels such as Sax Rohmer's *Fu-Manchu* series. Such sensationalism was echoed in the US press, which dubbed Chang the 'Limehouse Spider' and depicted him at the centre of a web of his unfortunate victims.

In 1925, on his release from Wormwood Scrubs prison, Chang was deported from Britain. Stories suggested he had been sighted in France, Belgium or Switzerland. The US press reported that he had opened a nightclub in Nice. Whatever the truth, the reality is that by 1928 the trail had run cold and Chang had disappeared without trace.

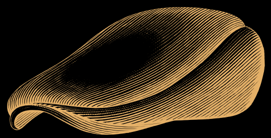
One century on, Chang's nefarious activities continue to be a rich source for dramatic interpretation. Chang was certainly a drug dealer whose activities had some tragic consequences. But he was also the focus of overt bigotry and portrayed as a folk devil, a depiction fuelled by the press to feed the moral panic that they themselves had created.

Images: Alamy



Fact vs fiction

Oswald Mosley is the main antagonist of series 5, based on the real politician who led the anti-Semitic fascist movement in 1930s Britain. As in the show, he was known for spouting extreme views on race and immigration at rallies that often descended into violence at the hands of his supporters, the Blackshirts.



SERIES FIVE

OSWALD MOSLEY AND THE RISE OF BRITISH FASCISM

An opportunist politician, his violent supporters and the people who rose up against them

Words Jonathan Gordon

Thousands of men and women were gathered on the streets of London on 4 October 1936. They were textile workers, dockers, community leaders, socialists, communists, local Jewish residents and everything between. In front of them were the Metropolitan Police and behind them members of the British Union of Fascists (BUF), the party of Sir Oswald Mosley, who had planned to march through the streets of East London only to find their route barricaded. "M-O-S-L-E-Y, we want Mosley," chanted his black-shirt wearing followers. "So do we, dead or alive," came the retort of the assembled protestors.

This was the stage for what would come to be known as the Battle of Cable Street, a historic clash between fascists and the residents of East London who had been tormented and provoked by the group for the last four years. While this would not mark the end of fascism in Britain, it has come to be seen as a final nail in the coffin of public opinion for the BUF and for Mosley who for so many years had been a popular, if eccentric, public figure.

TO THE MANOR BORN

Oswald Ernald Mosley was born on 16 November 1896 in Mayfair to Sir Oswald Mosley, 5th Baronet and Katharine Maud Edwards-Heathcote. After his parents separated, he was raised by his mother and lived with his grandparents in the stately Apedale Hall in Staffordshire for many years. In January 1914 he attended the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, but was expelled after only a few months for getting involved in a violent altercation over a polo defeat to a rival Aldershot academy. Still, he was commissioned to the 16th The Queen's Lancers during World War I and spent time in the trenches of the Western Front. His experiences during the war would lead to a continued anti-war stance in his politics for many years to come.

After the war he decided on a career in politics. In December 1918 he stood for election as a member of the Conservative Party in the district of Harrow, London, quickly gaining attention for his charismatic and powerful oratory as well as his colourful social life and womanising. Aged just 22 when he won, he was the youngest person to take a seat in the House of Commons. But while he represented the Tories in this election, it became clear Mosley had no firm political loyalties, even challenging future prime minister Neville Chamberlain for a seat in Birmingham as an independent in 1924.

Having lost that election he switched sides completely and ran for Labour in 1926, taking the seat of Smethwick. He was appointed to the cabinet of Ramsay MacDonald's Labour Government in 1929 as Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (a title for a minister without portfolio) where he was tasked with tackling the unemployment crisis after the Great Depression.

It's been estimated that about a quarter of the BUF membership were women, who had their own Women's Section within the party

The resultant Mosley Memorandum called for a move away from free trade to more protectionist economic policy. An executive council, something similar to a war cabinet but for peace time, was also proposed to tackle the emergency. The proposals were rejected as too pessimistic about Britain's economic prospects and too authoritarian. His ideas had some support, though, and he was praised for his bravery as he quit the government in response to this rejection in 1930.

> "Aged just 22, Mosley was the youngest person to take a seat in the House of Commons"

FASCISM IN BRITAIN

Mosley spent the next couple of years trying to define his political agenda, but he didn't immediately jump to fascism. First he formed the New Party on 28 February 1931. With the support of several Labour members and his wife Lady Cynthia Curzon, daughter of the 1st Earl Curzon of Kedleston, this new group sought support from across party lines based purely on its economic policies and government restructuring.

However, when they ran a candidate in a by-election for Ashton-under-Lyne in April 1931 they were soundly beaten. Worse still, Mosley's former Labour colleagues accused him of splitting the vote, allowing the Conservatives to win. The following October saw a General Election and a coalition government between Labour and the Conservatives, leaving Mosley with little hope of chipping away support from either party. The energy with which Mosley had left the government was in danger of slipping away when an invitation to Italy by Benito Mussolini set an entirely new course for him.

Mussolini's fascists had been in power since 1922 and the impact of this new political force had been seen across Europe in various guises. Britain was not entirely immune to this disturbing trend, although it had failed to gain much ground. The first of the fascist groups in Britain was the British Fascisti in 1923 organised by Rotha Linton-Orman. Splinter groups such as National Fascisti in 1924 and the Imperial Fascist League in 1929 emerged, but these were fringe organisations (numbering in the dozens). Mosley would soon change all of that.

Mosley's women

DIANA MITFORD

The third of six Mitford sisters was married to Bryan Guinness, heir to the brewing company of the same name, when she began an affair with Mosley. She divorced her husband and began appearing alongside Mosley in public soon after, eventually marrying him secretly at the home of Joseph Goebbels in Berlin in 1936. Hitler attended the wedding.

UNITY MITFORD

Unity joined the BUF along with her sister Diana in 1933. The pair travelled to Germany and Unity aggressively pursued a chance to meet Hitler. When she did finally become acquainted with the Führer, they apparently built a close friendship. She attempted suicide in 1939, and though she survived, she never fully recovered and died in 1948.

MARY RICHARDSON

Born in England and raised in Canada, Richardson had joined what she called "a Holy Crusade" of the women's suffrage movement in 1910. She was arrested nine times and served time in Holloway Prison for attacking a police officer. She joined Mosley's BUF in 1932, seeing some of the same commitment to action she had found in the militant suffragettes.

MARY SOPHIA ALLEN

Allen had been one of Britain's first female police officers. Prior to this she'd been in the Women's Political and Social Union and had been arrested numerous times for her part in their protests. She claimed she joined the BUF for its anti-war stance, but was a regular visitor to Germany and supporter of Franco in Spain.

Mosley and his first wife, Lady Curzon, pictured around the time of his election to the House of Commons in 1918

Mosley (front centre) pictured with some of his Blackshirts in 1935

FORMING THE BUF

The trip to meet Mussolini in January 1932 appears to have been revealing for Mosley. Both men disdained traditional government structures, appreciated military discipline and wanted to mobilise a younger generation to create change. Seeing what Mussolini had achieved in Italy, Mosley finally seems to have embraced authoritarianism outright.

He made his appreciation for fascism clear on his return to Britain and began to draw up his idea of a British version of it, much to the alarm of his New Party colleagues, including his wife, who did not share his affinity for this new political ideology. His constant affairs did not help the relationship, and Lady Curzon died in 1933 after surgery for peritonitis. Those who had supported Mosley among the establishment began to abandon him, even before he founded the BUF in October 1932. The party was launched alongside a manifesto entitled *The Greater Britain* that laid out Mosley's vision of British fascism, which was largely built on similar economic and political reforms he had advocated as a minister. The key difference was a much more sweeping change to the parliamentary system, with the whole country built around economic and business interests under a single leader. Mosley was betting that growing dissatisfaction with current political institutions would see support for such a revolution of government, much as it had done in Italy and Germany.

The manifesto itself got very little press attention, but Mosley remained a prominent draw for reporters. Between 1933 and 1937 he would average 200 speeches a year. At first his BUF didn't attract too much negative interest from the public, but it was expected. With the New Party he had a small group of men around to keep order during his speeches who became known as the 'Biff Boys'. This concept evolved into the Blackshirts for the BUF. In the years that followed, a training base was established in Chelsea, called the Black House, to train loyal BUF members in martial arts and military discipline. It's believed about 1,000 men lived in the Black House in its time.

To begin with this force involved strong young men wearing matching black uniform standing around the stage to offer protection to Mosley and throw out hecklers, which became more and more common as his fascist rhetoric took shape. From early on their motto was, "We never start fights, we only finish them." By 1933, Mosley also started to wear a black shirt for public appearances.

To much of the public, it looked a lot like Mosley was building a paramilitary force and could be planning for revolution. The politician who had once been seen as brave and bold, banging on the walls of an outdated system, was now seen as a potential threat. The growing violence around fascism in Europe, especially the rise of the Nazis in Germany, only raised concerns further.

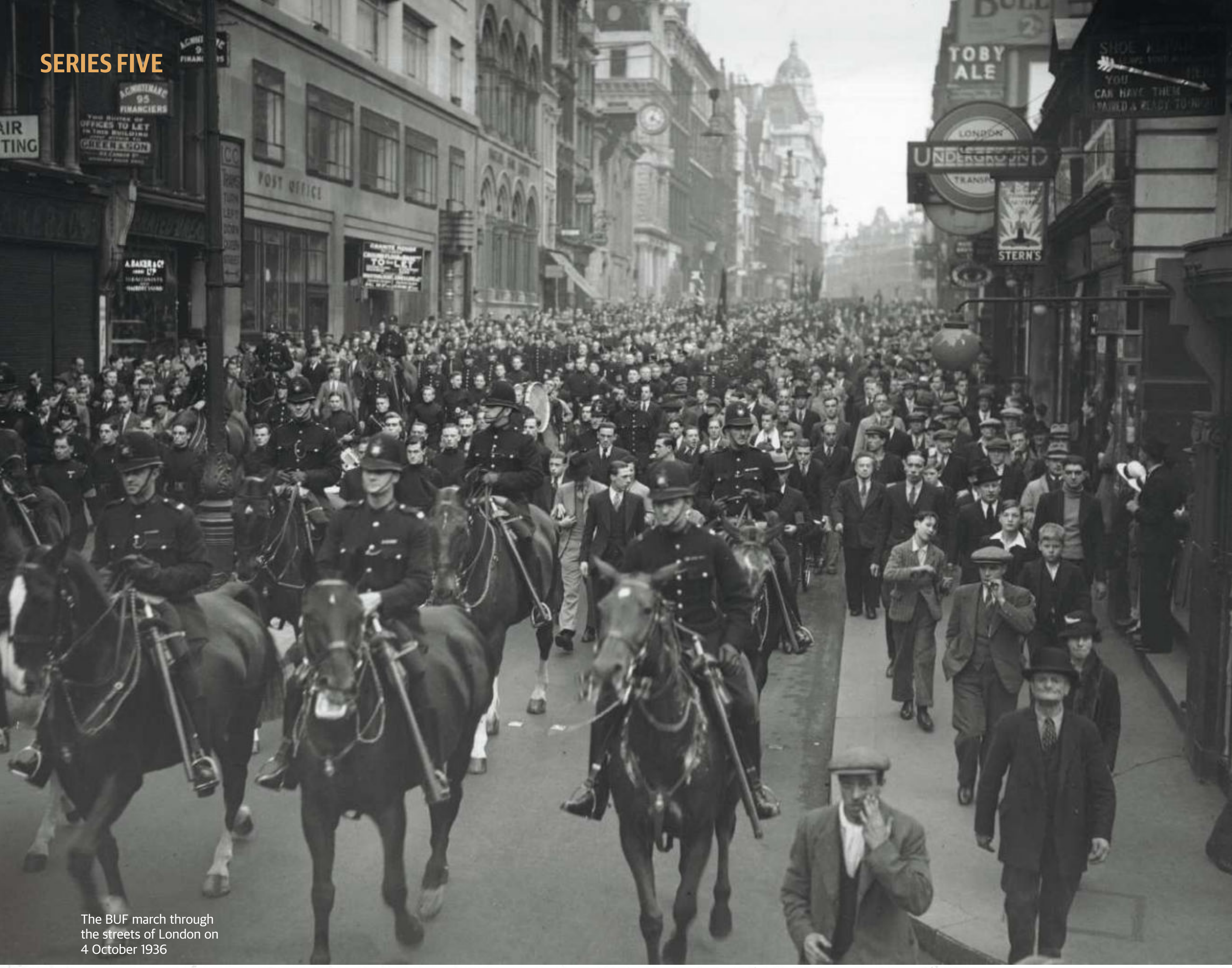
However, the endorsement of *Daily Mail* owner Lord Rothermere saw the BUF membership leap up. His article in the 8 January 1934 edition of the paper titled, 'Hurrah for the Blackshirts!' was followed by membership rising to 40-50,000, with conservative elites and disaffected workers alike drawn to the organisation. But as the party grew, so did the opposition against it.

OLYMPIA

Mosley had not openly endorsed anti-Semitic policies. In fact he told the *Jewish Chronicle* in January 1933, "anti-Semitism forms no part of the policy of this Organisation, and anti-Semitic propaganda is forbidden". However, that hadn't stopped BUF members from pushing this hateful agenda of their own accord. The Blackshirts were becoming notorious for provoking altercations with inflammatory propaganda and rhetoric in Jewish communities, such as Stepney in East London.

Oswald Mosley is portrayed by Sam Claflin in series five of Peaky Blinders

Having embraced fascism, the BUF was instantly opposed by socialists and communists who began to organise against them, leading to clashes at speeches and in the streets among newspaper sellers. While the Blackshirts were officially forbidden from carrying weapons in their role of keeping order at events, they were frequently reported using street fighting weapons such as knuckle dusters. Mosley publicly defended the increasing violence at his rallies as being in defence of free speech.



The BUF march through the streets of London on 4 October 1936

This all came to a head on 7 June 1934 when the BUF held a rally at Olympia, a massive event space in West Kensington, London. The event was intended as a show of strength, although Mosley still seems to have believed in achieving his goals through electoral politics, much as Hitler had just done in Germany.

15,000 people filled the huge hall, cheering and giving the Roman salute of fascist movements around Europe as Mosley took the stage. But they were not the only people represented in the room. As early as 25 May anti-fascist groups had been planning to infiltrate and disrupt the rally, taking up tickets through their unions and posing as BUF members to get in. They spread themselves through the crowd and interrupted with heckling throughout, one picking up when another was dragged out and beaten by Blackshirts.

The protest lasted an hour as 30 people were gradually ejected from the hall. The unrestrained violence that the Blackshirts inflicted on these protestors was witnessed and reported by the gathered press. While Mosley claimed these agitators were trying to silence free speech, the papers seemed to agree that even if that was the case, the violent response was excessive. Three weeks later the Night of Long Knives took place in Germany as the Nazis purged their political rivals, and the two events became tied together for many. In July, Lord Rothermere withdrew his support for the BUF, leaving them more isolated and resulting in an exodus of supporters.

"To much of the public, it looked a lot like Mosley was building a paramilitary force"

THE BATTLE OF CABLE STREET

As mentioned, up to this point Mosley had avoided outright anti-Semitism, but that was not true of his supporters, many of whom had joined the BUF because of an affinity with the more overtly anti-Semitic rhetoric of Hitler. William Joyce, for instance, was a virulent anti-Semite and was made propaganda director by Mosley in 1934. He would go on to become a WWII English-language Nazi propagandist under the name Lord Haw-Haw.

The role of organised Jewish opposition to the BUF became the new enemy for Mosley to rail against, saying on 28 October 1934 in his first reference to Jews in a public speech: "The Jews more than any other single force in this country are carrying on a violent propaganda against us." The leash was now off the anti-Semitic wing of the party with activities in Jewish communities, especially London, building up to what has become known as the Battle of Cable Street.

The BUF had planned to mark its fourth anniversary with a march through East London on 4 October 1936. After years of violent and provocative action in this part of London, where an estimated 183,000 Jewish people resided by the 1930s, the plan was clearly meant to incite a reaction. Despite concerns being raised to the Home Office the march was permitted, so the people of London took matters into their own hands.

After the war

Mosley abandoned the British Union of Fascists after the war, but still pushed much of the same agenda with his new organisation, the Union Movement. Alongside Euphorion Books, set up with his wife Diana Mosley to publish the works of right-wing authors, Mosley was committed to closer ties between Britain and Europe and stopping immigration from former colonial nations. The Mosleys left England in 1951 to live in Ireland and then France, close to their friends the Duke of Windsor and Wallis Simpson. Still, following race riots in Notting Hill in 1958, Mosley ran for election for Kensington North in 1959 and for Shoreditch & Finsbury in 1966, but lost on both occasions. After this final defeat he retired to France, where he wrote his autobiography. He was diagnosed with Parkinson's disease in 1977 and died on 3 December 1980 in Paris.

Mosley's attempts to make public appearances after the war were often met with violent resistance and arrests, such as here in Dalston in 1963

Mosley seemed to resist fascism as a movement at first, but was convinced after visiting Mussolini in Italy

Mosley embraced all of the trappings of fascism seen in Italy and Germany

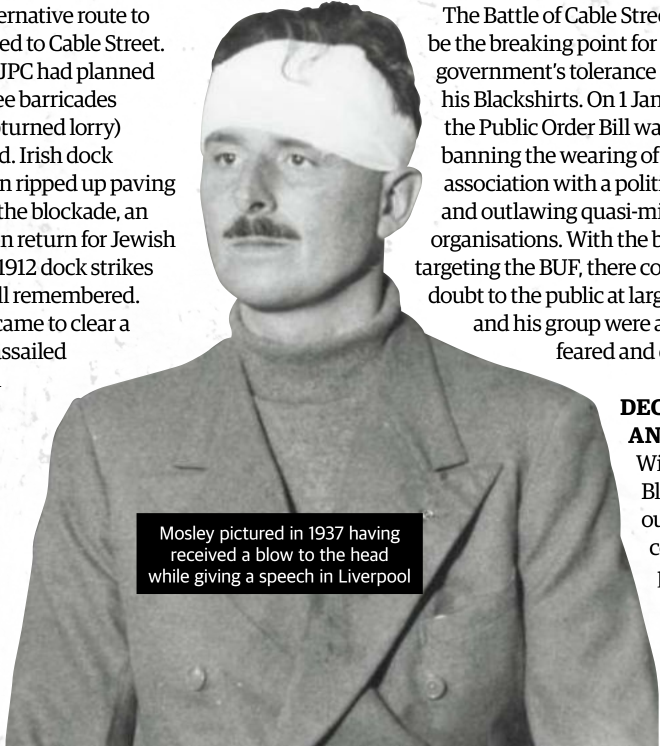
While some community leaders called for people to stay off the streets, unions and other community groups joined together to form the Jewish People's Council against Fascism and anti-Semitism (JPC) and planned their resistance to the march. On 3 October the Daily Worker printed a map of the fascist route through London and called for people to mass on key streets.

Lower estimates place around 20,000 protestors in London on the day, with higher estimates going up to 100,000 or even 250,000 up against 3,000 BUF members and some 6,000 police to protect them and clear the route. The anti-fascist crowd blocked the way to Whitechapel Road, making it impossible for the BUF to march as planned, so the police looked for an alternative route to clear. They headed to Cable Street.

However, the JPC had planned for this with three barricades (including an upturned lorry) blocking the road. Irish dock workers had even ripped up paving stones to add to the blockade, an act of solidarity in return for Jewish support in their 1912 dock strikes that was still well remembered.

When police came to clear a path they were assailed by missiles from the ground and surrounding windows above. As violence between police and protestors carried on, it became clear the fascists would not be able to pass and Commissioner of Police Sir Philip Game told Mosley to abandon the event. Eighty-three protestors were arrested and nearly 100 people were injured with footage of the confrontation, including mounted police hitting protestors with batons, being shown on news reels.

The Battle of Cable Street proved to be the breaking point for the British government's tolerance of Mosley and his Blackshirts. On 1 January 1937 the Public Order Bill was enacted banning the wearing of uniforms in association with a political movement and outlawing quasi-military organisations. With the bill so clearly targeting the BUF, there could be no doubt to the public at large that Mosley and his group were a menace to be feared and distrusted.



Mosley pictured in 1937 having received a blow to the head while giving a speech in Liverpool

DECLINE AND FALL

With the Blackshirts outlawed Mosley could no longer police his speeches and the local police forces were not as willing to resort to violence against hecklers. This made rallies and speeches even more challenging, reducing opportunities to spread his message. Growing tension between Britain and Germany saw national distaste for fascism increase too. Public appearances in Germany by BUF members, including Mosley's second wife Diana Mitford, didn't help matters.

When war was declared between the United Kingdom and Germany on 3 September 1939, fascism in Britain was a dead concept. Mosley's support for Hitler made him an enemy of the state and a threat to the nation. He was interned by the government in 1940, although he was released due to ill health in 1943. When he was released a poll revealed that 87 percent of the British public thought he should have remained in prison.

While the war would not be the end of Mosley as a public figure, he would never reach the heights of popularity he enjoyed in the early 1930s. It was not an impossibility for fascism to have taken hold in Britain – and Mosley might have been the only political figure capable of carrying it off. However, the violence and hatred that surrounded the movement, as well as its connection to foreign interests, ultimately scuppered its chances.

Images: Getty, Alamy.

THE RISE OF FASCISM

The spread of this extremist ideology after WWI had devastating consequences

MARCH ON ROME

1921-1922

Fascists in Italy gain the support of disgruntled unemployed war veterans who continue joining the party's paramilitary wing, known as Blackshirts. They intimidate socialists, occupy cities and hold a demonstration in Rome. The newly named National Fascist Party ascends to power and Mussolini is appointed Prime Minister.

1915

THE FASCIST MANIFESTO EMERGES 1919

Mussolini founds the Fasci di Combattimento, or Fascist Party. The Manifesto of the Italian Fasci of Combat advocates Italian nationalism.

HITLER INSPIRED BY MUSSOLINI 1923

Nazi Party leader Adolf Hitler admires Mussolini and attempts his own power-seizing march – the failed Beer Hall Putsch in Munich. Hitler is charged with treason.

AN UNHOLY ALLIANCE 1929

The Catholic Church briefly accepts Italy as a fascist state, gaining 109 acres in Rome in return for a new papal state and financial compensation, agreed in the Lateran Accords.

1929

MUSSOLINI MOVES AWAY FROM SOCIALISM 1915

Drafted into the Italian army, socialist journalist Benito Mussolini supports the war, breaking with socialist politics to form the Partito Fascista Rivoluzionario (PFR).

MUSSOLINI BECOMES A DICTATOR 1925

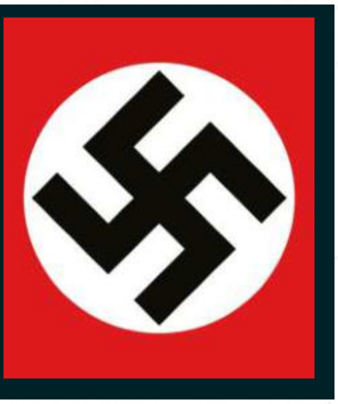
Mussolini consolidates his power and proclaims Italy a fascist state. He becomes Il Duce (the leader) and dismisses Parliament, barring opposition deputies.

THE FASCIST BRITS 1932

Former Conservative and Labour MP Oswald Mosley founds the British Union of Fascists after visiting Mussolini. It is briefly supported by the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Mirror* newspapers in 1934.

RISE OF THE NAZIS 1920

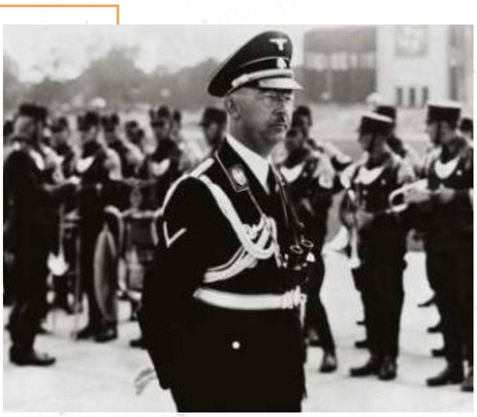
The National Socialist German Workers' Party is founded in 1920 by Anton Drexler. It adopts a black swastika as the main component of the party's flag and seeks nationalist expansionism as its goal. Anti-Semitic and anti-Marxist, it believes in a Volksgemeinschaft – a "people's community" of Aryan supremacy.



SECRET POLICE EMERGE

1926

Italy sows the seeds of its secret police: the Organisation for Vigilance and Repression of Anti-Fascism (OVRA). It relies on tip-offs to quash anti-fascist opposition while blackmailing priests to spy on the Vatican. OVRA paves the way for Himmler's German Gestapo in 1933.



2 MILLIONEN
ERWERBSLOSE
1,2 MILLIARDEN
FÜR FÜRSTEN

THE GREAT DEPRESSION 1931

The Austrian bank Creditanstalt declares bankruptcy and investor confidence in Germany collapses. Unemployment rises to 25 percent and fascists blame immigrants, minorities and left-wing internationalism. Fascist ideas appeal to some Americans: Henry Ford would work with businesses in Nazi Germany and accept an award from Hitler.

FASCISM DEMANDS EXPANSION 1939

Since fascism places great importance on national strength, there's a push for greater power and territorial expansion. Italy invaded Ethiopia in 1935 and Germany annexed Austria but Hitler's push into Poland is believed to be a step too far. Britain and France declare war.

NAZI PARTY TAKES POWER 1933

The Nazis are voted into power in Germany and, in April, their fascist agenda sees a boycott of Jewish business. Jews are gradually excluded from public life.

THE HOLOCAUST 1941

After years of oppression the Nazis begin rounding up and killing the Jewish population. 6 million people will be killed. Anyone who doesn't fit into a fascist Volksgemeinschaft is also exterminated.

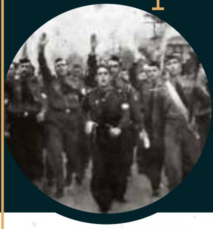
DECLINE OF AN IDEOLOGY 1945

Fascism fizzles out following victory of the Allies in WWII. Fascists are convicted of war crimes at Nuremberg.

1940

FRENCH FASCISTS 1934

A French Fascist and Antisemitic league, Mouvement Franciste, led by Marcel Bucard riots in Paris, protesting a financial scandal and seeking a right-wing coup d'état. It fails.



BRAZIL FAVOURS NATIONALISM 1937

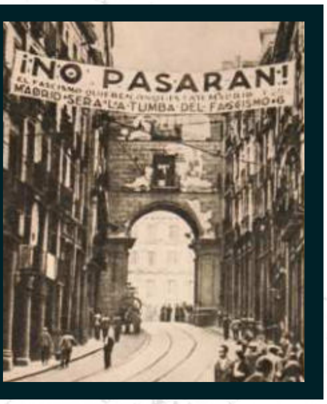
Fascism goes global. Dictator Getúlio Dornelles Vargasa cracks down on Brazilian Integralism, a nationalist, fascist, anti-liberalism movement with a green-shirted paramilitary group.

MUSSOLINI HEADS NEW PARTY 1943

Mussolini joined the war in 1940, keen to restore the Roman Empire in the Med. Failing, he leads a German puppet state with the Republican Fascist Party.

SPANISH CIVIL WAR 1936

The Spanish Civil War rages for three years, with Italy and Germany backing Francisco Franco's Nationalist forces against the democratically-elected Second Republic. Anti-fascist groups and individuals from around the world, travel to Spain in order to defend the government and challenge the rise of fascist oppression. A banner reads, "Madrid shall be fascism's grave", but the fascist-leaning Falange party go on to form the ruling government.



常任總務
協力會議長
事務總長

JAPANESE FASCISM 1940

To protect the culture and characteristics of its people, Japan believes military dictatorship and territorial expansion to be the way forward: the state representing salvation. Left-wing political dissidents are arrested as Japan follows Shōwa Statism, or what some dub Japanese fascism.

Images: Getty

What does the upcoming series hold for the Shelbys?

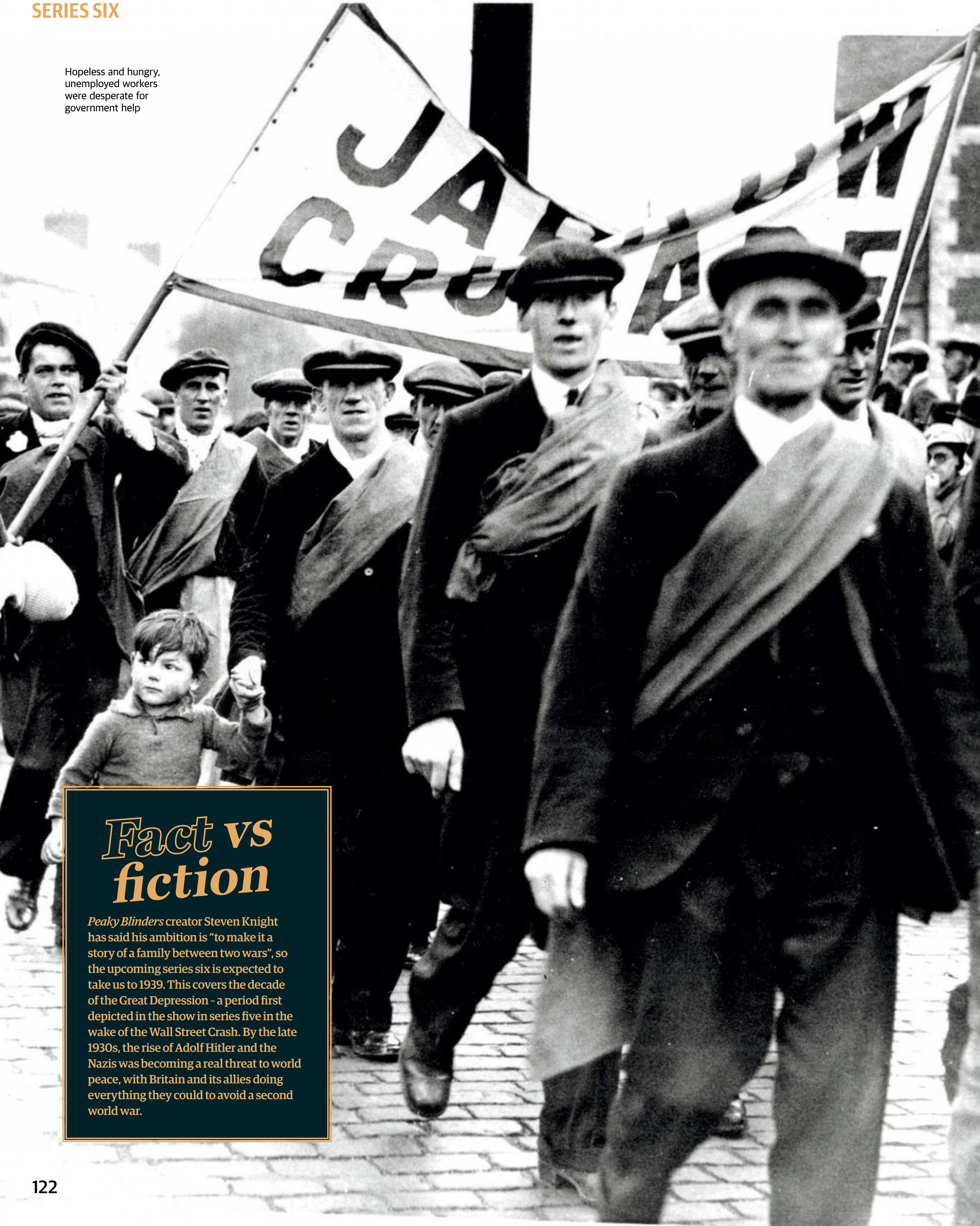
1930 and beyond

SERIES SIX

122 **BRITAIN AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION**
The crash in 1929 triggered a financial crisis that devastated economies and livelihoods over the following decade – Britain was no exception

126 **TIMELINE: THE INTERWAR YEARS**
A summary of major events in Britain's interwar period – what could we see in the final series as the world heads towards war once again?

Image: Alamy



Hopeless and hungry, unemployed workers were desperate for government help

Fact vs fiction

Peaky Blinders creator Steven Knight has said his ambition is "to make it a story of a family between two wars", so the upcoming series six is expected to take us to 1939. This covers the decade of the Great Depression – a period first depicted in the show in series five in the wake of the Wall Street Crash. By the late 1930s, the rise of Adolf Hitler and the Nazis was becoming a real threat to world peace, with Britain and its allies doing everything they could to avoid a second world war.

SERIES SIX

BRITAIN AND THE GREAT DEPRESSION

When the Great Depression plunged Britain into misery in the 1930s, the country had never known anything like it. Unemployment soared, businesses collapsed, and the government and populace were left reeling

Words Catherine Curzon

In 1929, the Great Depression famously brought the United States to its knees, but its impact wasn't isolated to just one country. The devastating effect of economic collapse crossed the globe like a tsunami, sweeping through the financial markets and leaving few places untouched. The crash of the American stock market had a ruinous impact on economies worldwide and Great Britain, itself still desperately trying to stumble back towards normality after World War I, was among the nations who felt the shattering impact.

When the Depression hit Great Britain in 1931, it found a nation that might have claimed the victory in World War I but had been left in deprivation in doing so. Britain was in the midst of its economic recovery and at the heart of its financial restoration was the so-called gold standard, which equated the value of a unit of currency to its equivalent amount in gold. Though Britain had abandoned the gold standard soon after the outbreak of the war, when Winston Churchill was appointed chancellor in 1924, he championed a return to the system. Against the advice of experts and advisors, who warned that a jump in the exchange rate would lead to unemployment, reduced demand for British exports and calamity in the nation's industry, Churchill decided to press ahead. He returned Britain to the gold standard at an exchange rate of $4.86 to £1.

This meant that the exchange rate leapt up by ten percent and the cost of British exports overseas immediately skyrocketed. Unable to absorb the ten percent cost by lowering prices, industries responded by cutting wages, leaving workers at home less money to spend in their own economy. It was the start of a ruinous cycle. With the overseas demand for British goods falling as a result of the hike in the exchange rate, the export market went into immediate decline and Britain began to feel the pinch. Unemployment in the country was already averaging 1 million and with British industry toiling under the effects of the recession, it

Desperate to be heard, in 1936 200 unemployed residents of Jarrow marched to London to demand assistance for their deprived town

THE CHAIN IS LINKED

COUNTRY UNITES in GIANT TASK

FROM GOVAN—GEARS

FROM MILLWALL—PROPELLERS

FROM STAFFORDSHIRE—ANCHORS

In areas powered by heavy industry, the Depression left wastelands and thousands unemployed

> "In the space of 12 months, employment doubled, leaving 20 percent of the workforce without a job"

became a real fight for workers in the industrial heartlands to keep their heads above water.

The worldwide Depression proved to be the death blow to regions that relied on heavy industry and export. With demand for British exports already lowered in the aftermath of war when all countries were feeling the financial pinch, the Depression caused the demand to dry up altogether. In the space of 12 months employment doubled, leaving 20 percent of the workforce without a job and with little hope of getting another. The efforts of the unprepared minority Labour government became focused on providing help to people who were now mired in grinding poverty. In July 1931, the May Report concluded that the only way to balance the public books was to increase taxes for the rich, cut wages in the public sector further and slash public spending. Particularly singled out for a cut was the benefit paid to the unemployed. Already far from generous, it was now to be slashed by a further ten percent.

These extreme means caused a split in government, bringing an already shaky administration it to its knees and causing panic among those investors who still remained. With the economy apparently in freefall, they panicked. What capital remained in Britain was withdrawn, destabilising what was left of the economy. Exhausted by recession, the government crumbled. It was initially replaced by the National Government, a coalition of Labour, Conservative and Liberal politicians, but in the ensuing general election the Conservatives scooped up votes across the board, leaving Labour on the margins of government.

The new administration immediately put emergency measures into action. As taxes went up, public sector wages and unemployment benefits were cut still further in an effort to sink more money into recovery. Instead, these emergency plans only served to lessen the spending power of the nation and Britain sank deeper into the red and unemployment hit an unthinkable 3 million.

For the increasing number of Britons without work, the future looked bleak indeed. Though the nation's welfare system was certainly one of the most developed in the world, it was far from generous even before the swinging cuts were put in place. Benefits were paid out according to the contributions that the recipients had paid in while working and even then they could only claim for a maximum of 15 weeks. Once the recipient reached the payment threshold of 15 weeks, their payments were stopped and they were left on the often scant mercy of local poor law relief, which was paid out by local authorities. Yet as the recession gripped Britain, there was little spare money to go into poor law relief, and for those at the bottom of the pay scale who had not earned enough to pay into the unemployment scheme, there was no government assistance at all.

With sources of benefits drying up and more and more people joining the ranks of the unemployed, poverty grew at an unchecked rate and it was clear that something had to be done. Local rates were no longer providing anywhere near enough money to match the demand on poor law relief and a decision was eventually taken to completely centralise the welfare system, making it payable from national taxes rather than local rates. In 1931 the government was forced to introduce a new unemployment benefit system that paid according to individual need, not to the contributions the claimant had already put in. The level of need was to be assessed via a strict means test, in which a government officer would scrutinise the applicant's finances to ensure that they weren't attempting to hide money and that they were living as frugally as possible. There was precious little room for interpretation or manoeuvre and the means test provided no opportunities for anything that might be thought even slightly frivolous.

These Public Assistance Committees were often embarrassing experiences. They were exhaustive, intrusive and often insensitive, and those who were subject to the means test were humiliated by the procedure. It was a brutal and sometimes dehumanising

As unemployment soared, desperate workers sought assurances for the future

ECHO MARGARINE

In the north, the decimation of industry led to a collapse in social conditions

experience that hit claimants hard at a time when they were already despairing. Subjected to the full scrutiny of government assessors, families were forced to sell even the smallest items that were deemed luxurious, regardless of their sentimental value.

Through all of the catastrophe and even as the dole queues got longer in the industrial heartlands, the Treasury clung to the gold standard, convinced that it alone could hold the key to economic recovery. Yet by autumn 1931, it had become painfully apparent that the gold standard was no longer viable. The Treasury was forced to abandon it.

Far from sounding the death knell for the economy, the decision proved revelatory. The exchange rate fell and British exports were suddenly financially viable and attractive for overseas markets again. The market began to slowly recover and bit by bit, Britain clawed its way out of the Depression. With 24 percent of the workforce unemployed and industrial areas mired in poverty, it had come not a moment too soon.

Though Britain could now start to slowly rebuild, it was a painfully slow process. Though recovery in the south east was faster, in heavily industrial areas such as Wales and the north, industry had been decimated. In Glasgow alone, 30 percent of the total workforce were unemployed. Workers turned out on hunger marches to raise awareness of their plight. With barely enough money to feed their families, the health of workers was failing. Poor and restricted diets and unsanitary living conditions contributed to mortality and illness rates, leading to the first debates around the concept of a national health service, free to all at the point of delivery.

For those who still had a job and a wage however, life could be sweet. With prices dropping to try and encourage purchasing, they could treat themselves once in a while and tempting initiatives such as hire purchase emerged for those who could afford to meet the terms. Entertainment was one of the few things that remained accessible to virtually all, though in varying degrees. Even the poorest households usually had access to a wireless and though they couldn't afford to visit theatres and cinemas, radio entertainment provided some scant respite from the grinding misery of the Depression. The golden age of British wireless had arrived.

In 1934 the Unemployment Act divided unemployment and insurance benefits and restored the ten percent cut that had been made to the dole. Though Unemployment Assistance Boards continues means testing, the tests were less intrusive and humiliating for those who faced them. In the aftermath of the Depression were the foundations of the Labour Party's "cradle to grave" welfare and health system, which gave according to need and for the first time there was an effort to appreciate that those who were unemployed were not responsible for their own plight, but victims of a worldwide tragedy.

By the time Britain entered World War II, unemployment was falling and hard-hit areas were targeted by a government focussed on reversing economic decline. Recovery was slow and painful and the effects of the Depression continued to be felt in Britain for many decades after it had passed.

Key figures

WINSTON CHURCHILL

Winston Churchill was appointed chancellor of the exchequer in 1924 by Stanley Baldwin. Now feted for his wartime premiership, when he restored Britain to the gold standard in 1925, it was against his better judgement. The decision would go on to prove catastrophic for the British economy and Churchill lost his seat in 1929.

RAMSAY MACDONALD

Ramsay MacDonald presided as prime minister from 1929 to 1935 and steered the country through the Great Depression. As head of the National Government, MacDonald's willingness to form a coalition with his political opponents led his former Labour comrades to regard him as a traitor to the party.

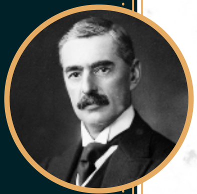
PHILIP SNOWDEN

Philip Snowden was chancellor of the exchequer from 1929 until 1931 and was expelled from the Labour Party for his loyalty to the National Government. This hard-nosed and financially astute politician was known for his inflexibility and when his recommendations for a new tax on imports went unheeded, he resigned.

OSWALD MOSLEY

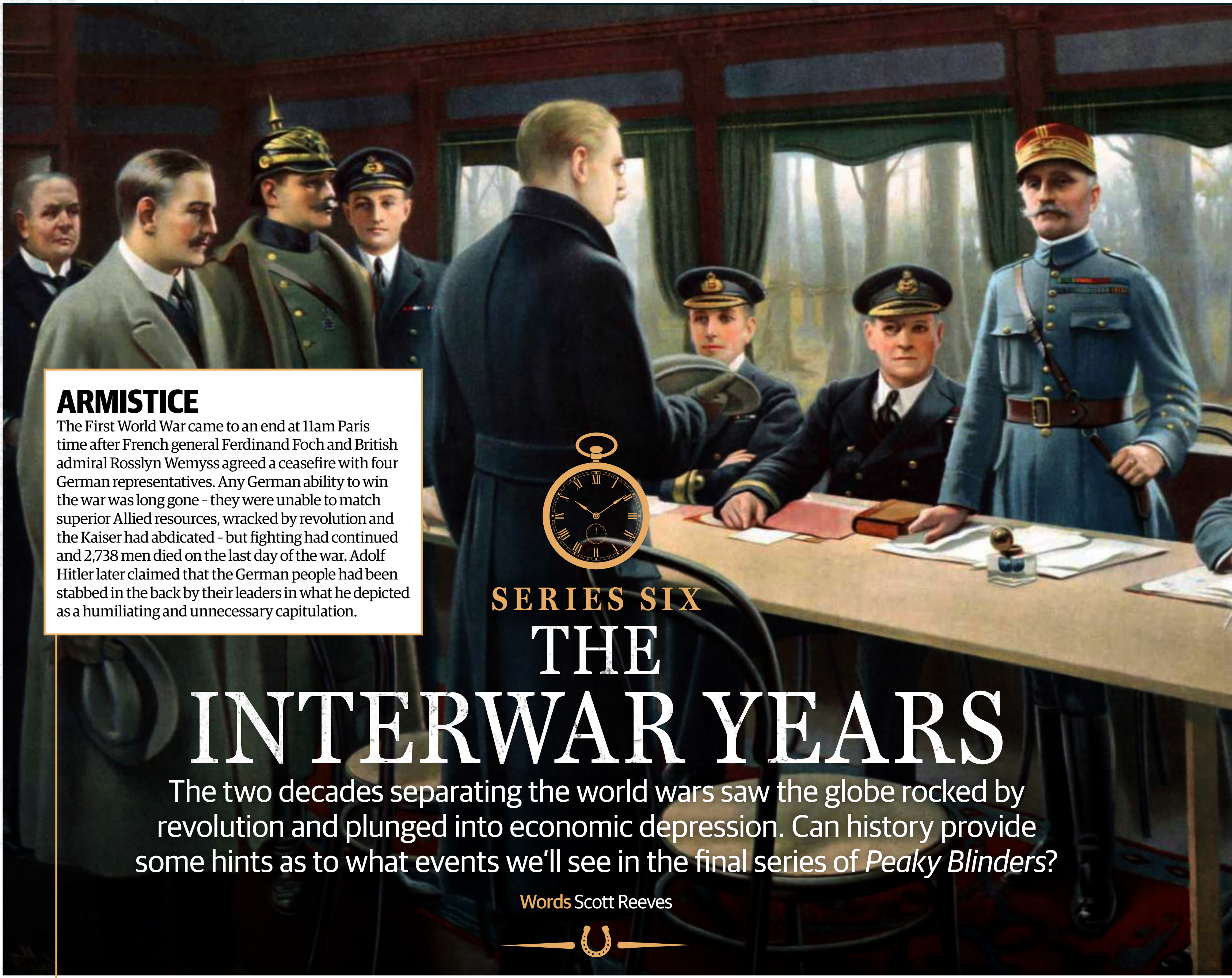
Later to become the notorious leader of the British Union of Fascists, Oswald Mosley advocated a massive programme of public works that would provide employment and drive economic rebirth. This one-time Tory had crossed the floor to Labour but when his plans were rejected, he founded the New Party.

NEVILLE CHAMBERLAIN



When he was appointed chancellor of the exchequer in 1931, Neville Chamberlain passed a ten percent import tax from which the colonies were exempt and maintained the strict budget that was already in place. He presided over the creation of the Unemployed Assistance Board, which assured benefits for those who had paid into the system and those who hadn't, too.

Images: Alamy, Getty



11 November 1918

ARMISTICE

The First World War came to an end at 11am Paris time after French general Ferdinand Foch and British admiral Rosslyn Wemyss agreed a ceasefire with four German representatives. Any German ability to win the war was long gone - they were unable to match superior Allied resources, wracked by revolution and the Kaiser had abdicated - but fighting had continued and 2,738 men died on the last day of the war. Adolf Hitler later claimed that the German people had been stabbed in the back by their leaders in what he depicted as a humiliating and unnecessary capitulation.

SERIES SIX

THE INTERWAR YEARS

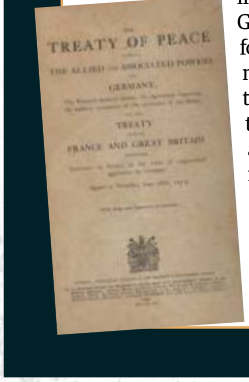
The two decades separating the world wars saw the globe rocked by revolution and plunged into economic depression. Can history provide some hints as to what events we'll see in the final series of *Peaky Blinders*?

Words Scott Reeves

28 June 1919

TREATY OF VERSAILLES

The Treaty of Versailles officially brought hostilities to an end between Germany and the Allies. It was signed five years to the day after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, an event in which Germany played no role, so it is ironic that the treaty required Germany to accept responsibility for the First World War. The negotiators had to steer a course through the conflicting aims of the various countries involved and the resulting treaty, which required Germany to disarm, relinquish territory and pay a huge reparations bill, undoubtedly played a role in destabilising Europe over the next two decades.



TREATY OF PEACE

GERMANY.

TREATY

FRANCE AND GREAT BRITAIN

12 October 1919

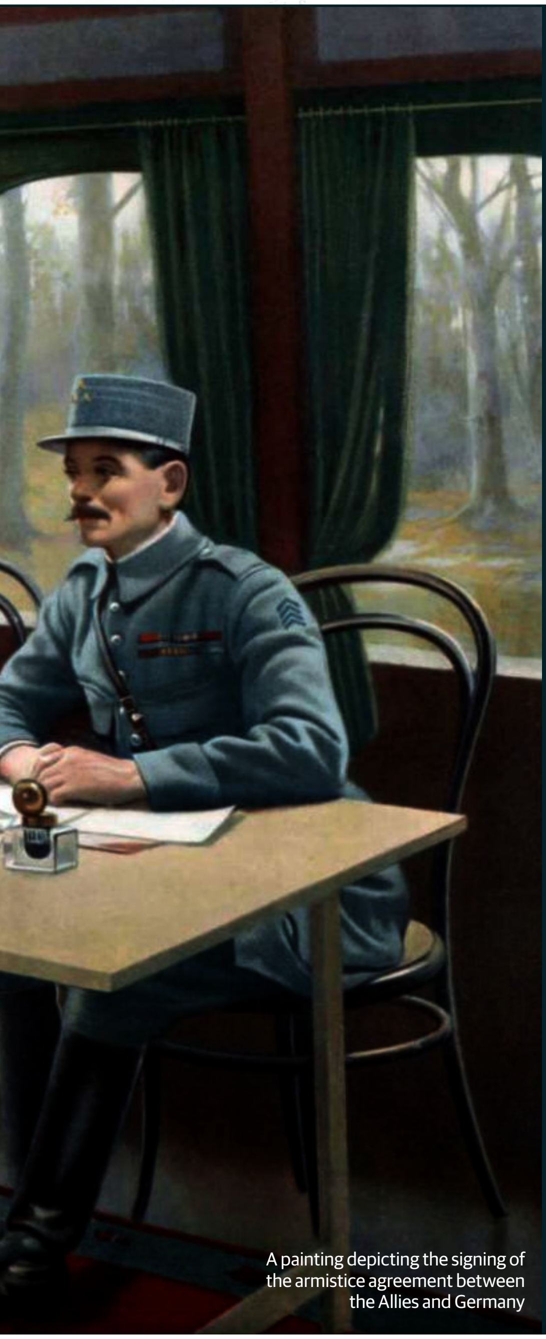
EVACUATION OF MURMANSK

When the last British soldiers left Russian soil, it helped seal the fate of the Whites in the Russian Civil War. The anti-socialist faction had opposed the Bolsheviks since the Russian Revolution and engaged the help of Britain and her wartime allies to reopen the Eastern Front, but the end of the war and Bolshevik military advances meant that the Reds slowly gained control over the vast former Russian Empire. The Whites continued a fitful campaign of resistance for the next few years, but it was a losing cause and many monarchists ended up exiled from their homeland.

17 January 1920

PROHIBITION

The USA turned dry for 13 years when the 18th Amendment and Volstead Act made the production, importation and sale of alcohol illegal. Although Prohibition aimed to fix problems in society blamed on drinking - domestic violence, health problems, even political corruption - the banning of booze had unintended consequences. Many Americans were not prepared to give up their favourite tipple and the alcohol industry went underground, dominated by organised criminal syndicates. Alcohol was smuggled into the States to be sold on the black market and in unlicensed speakeasies while violent crime increased as gangs fought for control of the lucrative trade.



A painting depicting the signing of the armistice agreement between the Allies and Germany

28 April 1925

GOLD STANDARD

Winston Churchill made a splash in his first budget as Chancellor of the Exchequer when he announced that the UK would return to the gold standard, fixing the value of the pound to the price of gold. It was a mechanism that had served Britain well in the 19th century by encouraging stable exchange rates. However, reverting to the gold standard at the pre-war rate after the travails of the First World War (Britain had come off gold in 1914 to help fund the war effort) led to wage reductions which in turn led to unemployment, strikes and lockouts.

3 May 1921

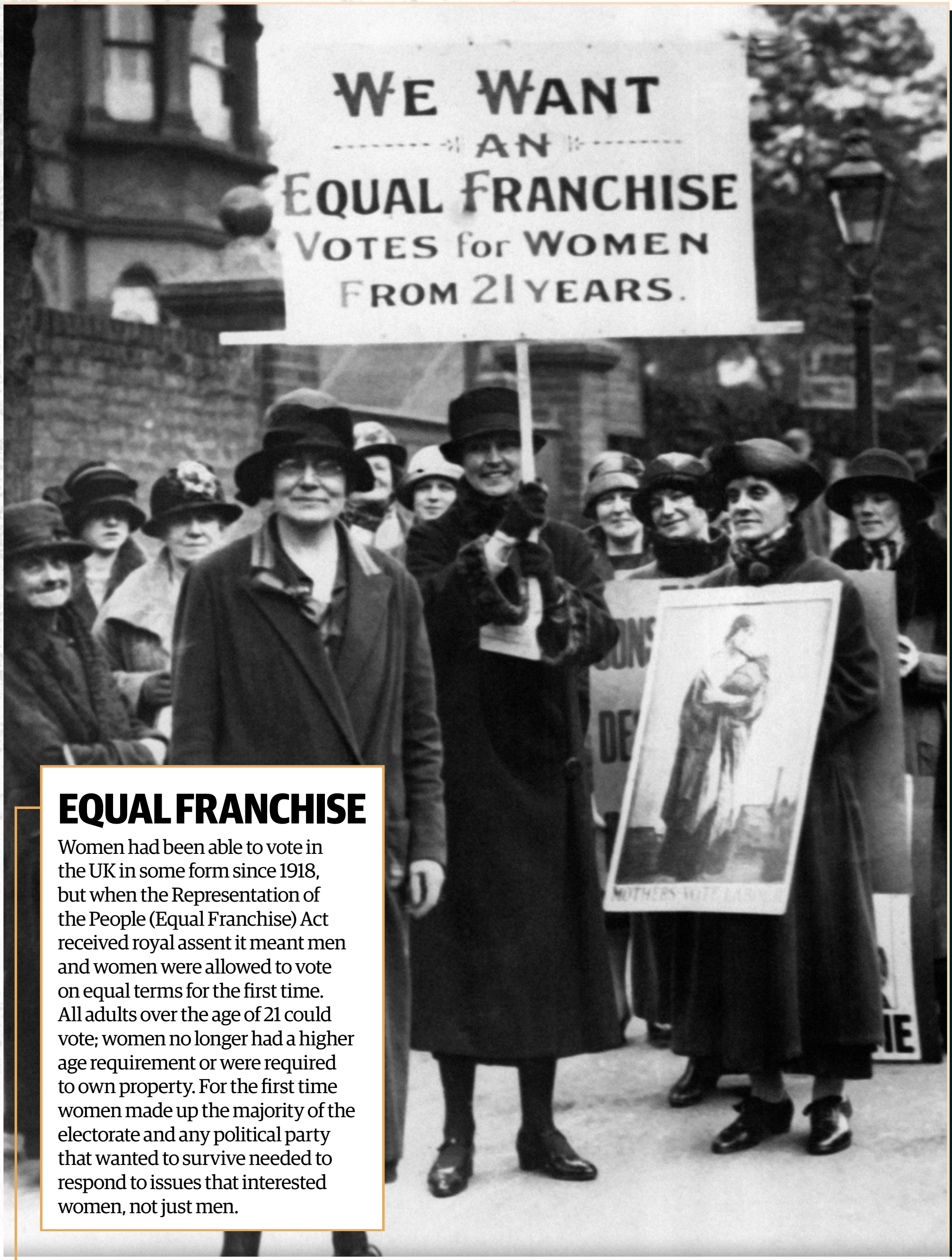
PARTITION OF IRELAND

Tensions had been bubbling over in Ireland since the Home Rule Crisis, prior to the First World War. The British government tried to quell the anger by dividing Ireland into two self-governing polities: Northern Ireland (with a Protestant and Unionist majority) and Southern Ireland (with a Catholic and Nationalist majority). The original intention was for both territories to remain part of the UK and eventually reunite but the south opted out, demanded independence and formed the Irish Free State. Violence followed between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland while the south slipped into civil war over the exact constitutional nature of the Free State.

4-12 May 1926

GENERAL STRIKE

Faced with the prospect of mine owners lengthening their employees' working day and lowering wages, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) organised a national walkout in an attempt to grind the country to a halt. Although 1.7 million workers refused to clock in, the government was prepared for the crisis. Essential supplies and services were maintained by the Army and middle-class volunteers while Churchill published a government newspaper, the British Gazette, and portrayed the strikers as revolutionaries. With little prospect of the government backing down, the TUC called off the strike after nine days and the miners were left to fend for themselves.



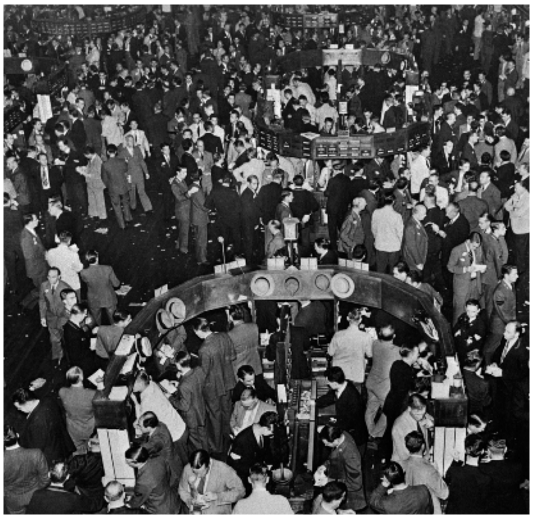
2 July 1928

EQUAL FRANCHISE

Women had been able to vote in the UK in some form since 1918, but when the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act received royal assent it meant men and women were allowed to vote on equal terms for the first time. All adults over the age of 21 could vote; women no longer had a higher age requirement or were required to own property. For the first time women made up the majority of the electorate and any political party that wanted to survive needed to respond to issues that interested women, not just men.

24-29 October 1929

THE WALL STREET CRASH

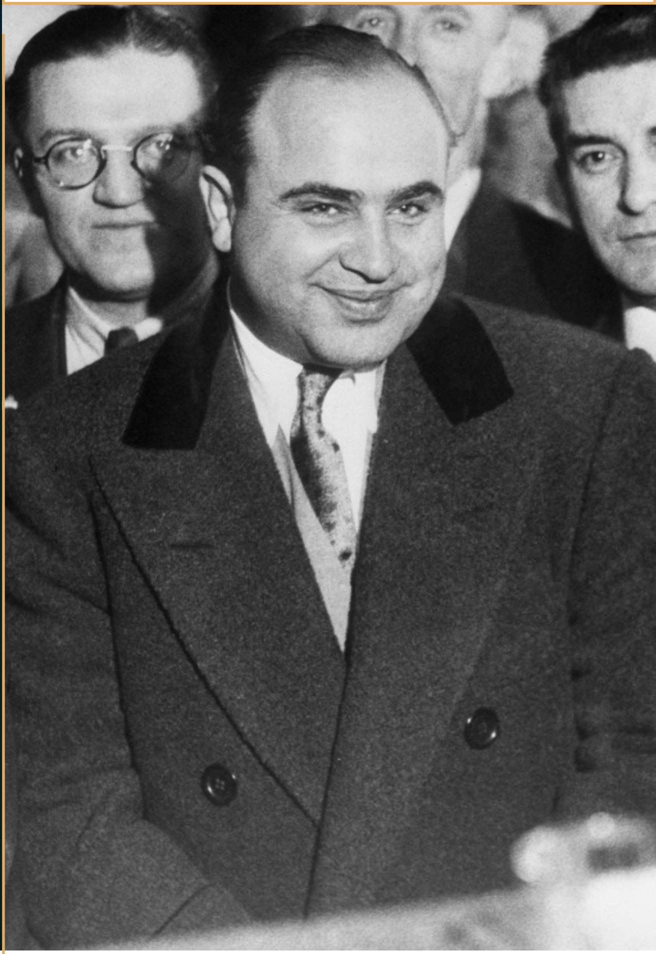


Nerves were already fraught when the opening bell sounded to begin trading on the New York Stock Exchange. Within minutes, share prices plummeted 11%. Black Thursday had begun. Attempts to shore up the market failed to stop the panic and share prices continued to fall on Black Tuesday. It wasn't just frazzled traders and bankers who were affected, the impact of the Wall Street Crash was felt around the world. Investors saw their fortunes wiped out, businesses and banks went bust, American loans abroad were recalled. Over the next decade, countries around the world were plunged into the Great Depression.

17 October 1931

CAPONE CONVICTED

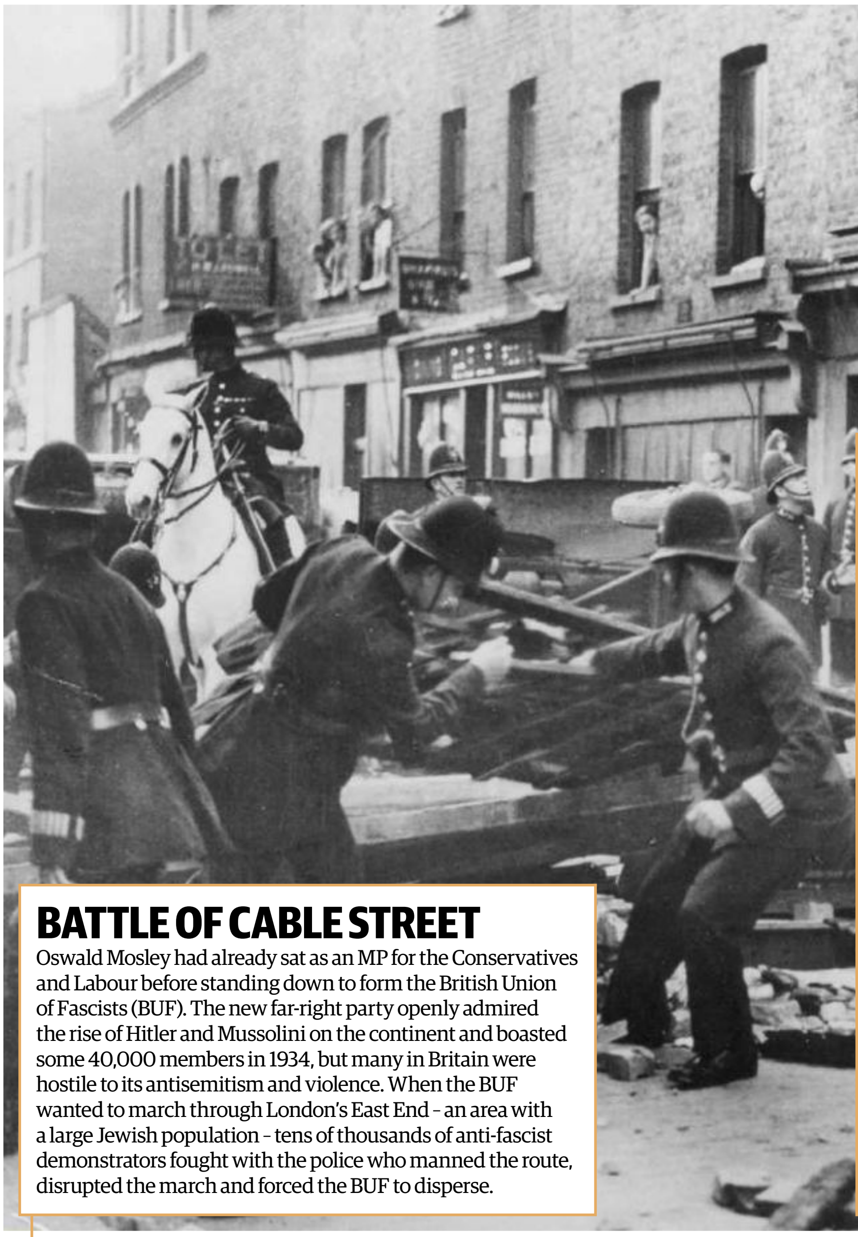
After a seven-year stint as boss of the Chicago Outfit, crime lord Al Capone was convicted of five counts of tax evasion. It was little more than a ploy to get the dangerous gangster off the street – the authorities could not pin any more serious crimes on him, although there was little doubt that Capone and his cronies were responsible for a string of murders, violent assaults and racketeering. He served eight of the 11 years he was sentenced to prison. By the time Capone was released on health grounds, Prohibition had been repealed and organised crime was no longer the powerful force it once was.



30 January 1933

HITLER BECOMES CHANCELLOR

The improbable rise of the Nazis from radical revolutionaries to governing party was completed when President Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler as chancellor. Hindenburg realised he had little option but to work with the Nazi leader after they won the most seats in the Reichstag elections in July and November 1932, but he hoped to retain control by appointing veteran politician Franz Von Papen as vice-chancellor. It didn't work. Hitler quickly took an iron grip on Germany, banning other political parties, purging opponents and naming himself president, chancellor and head of the army when Hindenburg died 17 months later.

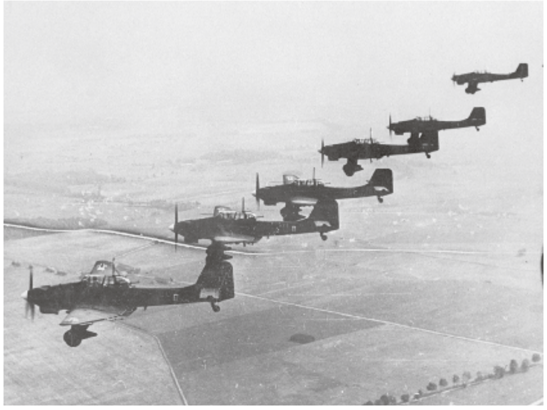


BATTLE OF CABLE STREET

Oswald Mosley had already sat as an MP for the Conservatives and Labour before standing down to form the British Union of Fascists (BUF). The new far-right party openly admired the rise of Hitler and Mussolini on the continent and boasted some 40,000 members in 1934, but many in Britain were hostile to its antisemitism and violence. When the BUF wanted to march through London's East End - an area with a large Jewish population - tens of thousands of anti-fascist demonstrators fought with the police who manned the route, disrupted the march and forced the BUF to disperse.

INVASION OF POLAND

German influence and control had already spread into Austria and Czechoslovakia when Nazi foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop signed a non-aggression pact with his Soviet counterpart. The deal had a secret protocol that gave Hitler the freedom to invade Poland and Nazi soldiers poured across the border eight days later, but Hitler underestimated British and French resolve to finally stand up to him. Both countries declared war on Germany on 3 September and, although quickly Poland fell to the Third Reich and the USSR, the invasion marked the beginning of the Second World War in Europe and Nazi Germany's ultimate defeat.



4 October 1936

5-31 October 1936

1 July 1937

1 September 1939

25 June 1940

JARROW MARCH

The closure of Palmer's Shipyard left the North East town of Jarrow bereft of its main employer. In response, around 200 men left the town hall amidst much publicity and walked to London, carrying with them a petition requesting a government commitment to bring jobs back to Jarrow. The 'crusade', as the marchers liked to call it, was a cry for help that initially appeared to have no effect - Parliament declined to debate the petition - but soon came to symbolise the desperation of industrial workers during the Depression. Demands that the government improve social welfare began to grow.

IRISH PLEBISCITE

The people of the Irish Free State gave a thumbs-up to a new constitution when it was put to a national vote in the summer of 1937. Many aspects of the old constitution had already been dismantled; the Irish no longer needed to swear an oath of loyalty to the British crown and the office of governor-general had been abolished. Now Éamon de Valera, President of the Executive Council, wanted to sever the last remaining links with Britain. He emphasised this in the use of the Irish language to name government institutions and in the name of the new state, Éire.

BIRMINGHAM BLITZ

After the months of 'phoney war' in which little fighting occurred in Western Europe, the eerie wail of air raid sirens first sounded over Birmingham in the summer of 1940 and sent residents scuttling to their shelters. Although the German planes simply passed overhead en route to a different target, the Luftwaffe would return 77 times with Birmingham firmly fixed in their bomb sights. More than 100 tons of bombs were dropped on eight occasions and, by the war's end, 2,241 Brummies had been killed, 12,391 houses had been destroyed and 302 factories put out of commission.

Series creator Stephen Knight originally planned for *Peaky Blinders* to end with the first air raid sirens for WWII sounding over Birmingham. However, in January 2022 he announced that *Blinders* will continue through WWII and beyond in an upcoming film to conclude the story.

Images: Alamy, Getty

STEP BACK IN TIME WITH OUR HISTORY TITLES

Immerse yourself in a world of emperors, pioneers, conquerors and legends and discover the events that shaped humankind

Follow us on Instagram @futurebookazines

FUTURE

www.magazinesdirect.com

Magazines, back issues & bookazines.

REAL HISTORY OF THE

PEAKY BLINDERS

SERIES ONE

THE REAL PEAKY BLINDERS

"The real Peaky Blinders might not have quite had the visual dynamism of the gang depicted in the TV series, but all evidence suggests they were equally as violent and ruthless"

REAL BLINDERS

Find out how the real Peaky Blinders gang inspired the creation of the Shelby clan

BRITAIN AFTER THE GREAT WAR

Truth vs fiction

INTERWAR BRITAIN

Learn more about this fascinating period and the events that put the show in context

SERIES FOUR

THE REAL JESSIE EDEN

Truth vs fiction

HISTORICAL FIGURES

Meet the heroes and villains from history who have appeared as characters in the show

SERIES SIX

THE INTERWAR YEARS

WHAT'S NEXT?

With the Second World War on the horizon, what events could be depicted in the final series?

BOOKAZINE

9021

9000